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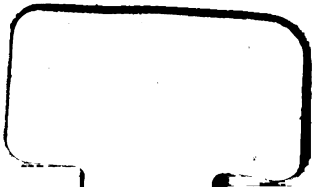

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ESSAYS

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS

TO A FRIEND,

ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

I. ON A MAN'S WRITING MEMOIRS OF HIMSELF.

II. ON DECISION OF CHARACTER.

III. ON THE APPLICATION OF THE EPITHET ROMANTIC.

IV. ON SOME OF THE CAUSES BY WHICH EVANGELICAL RELIGION HAS BEEN RENDERED LESS ACCEPTABLE TO PERSONS OF CULTIVATED TASTE.

BY JOHN FOSTER.

Inspicere, tanquam in speculum, in vitas omnium
Jubeo, atque ex aliis sumere exemplum sibi.
Ter.

TWO VOLUMES IN ONE.

VOL. I.

First American from the third London Edition.

HARTFORD:
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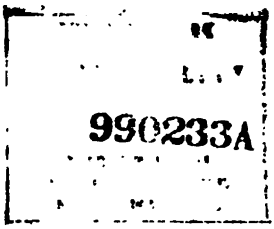
1807.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ADVERTISEMENT.

PERHAPS it will be thought that pieces written so much in the manner of set compositions as the following, should not have been denominated Letters; it may therefore be proper to say, that they are so called because they were actually addressed to a friend. They were written however with the intention to print them, if, when they were finished, the writer could persuade himself that they deserved it; and the character of authors is too well known for any one to be surprised that he *could* persuade himself of this.

When he began these letters, his intention was to confine himself within such limits, that essays on twelve or fifteen subjects might have been comprised in a volume. But he soon found that an interesting subject could not be so fully unfolded as he wished, in such a narrow space. It appeared to him that many things which would be excluded, as much belonged to the purpose of the essay as those which would be introduced.

It will not seem a very natural manner of commencing a course of letters to a friend, to enter formally on a subject, in the first sentence. In excuse for this abruptness it may be mentioned, that an introductory letter went before that which appears first in the series; but as it was written in the presumption that a considerable variety of subjects would be treated in the compass of a moderate number of letters, it is omitted, as being less adapted to precede what is executed in a manner so different from the design.

When writing which has occupied a considerable length, and has been interrupted by considerable intervals of time, which is also on very different subjects, and was perhaps meditated under the influence of different circumstances, is at last all read over in one short space, this immediate succession and close comparison make the writer sensible of some things of which he was not aware in the slow, separate stages of his progress. On thus bringing the following essays under one review, the writer perceives some reason to apprehend that the spirit of the third will appear so different from that of the second, as to give an impression

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of something like inconsistency. The second may seem to represent that a man may effect almost every thing, the third that he can effect scarcely any thing. The writer however persuades himself that the one does not assert the efficacy of human resolution and effort, under the same conditions under which the other asserts their inefficacy; and that therefore there is no real contrariety between the principles of the two essays. Allowing a human agent to possess power within *certain limits*, (though those limits be narrow,) but then asserting his utter imbecility beyond those limits; there will inevitably be a great contrast between the assemblage of sentiments and exemplifications adapted strongly to illustrate that power alone, and another assemblage adapted to illustrate that imbecility alone. If the contrast, in these essays, is thought too great, the writer is willing to appeal to the experience of reflective men, whether they have not often found the class of sentiments and facts which appeared the correct illustration of one principle, so strikingly uncongenial with those by which they had before correctly illustrated another principle, as to cause a doubt whether both those principles could be true; till, on examination, they have perceived the apparent opposition to arise, not from a real inconsistency of the principles, but from each of them being illustrated quite apart from its relations with the other, and perhaps illustrated consequently with a certain degree of exaggeration. In seeking the strongest means of impressing a practical principle, the mind naturally adopts those which represent it in the extreme.—If, after all, a serious reader shall think the essay on decision of character, is not exactly concordant throughout with the christian spirit of meekness, humility and submission, the writer will readily express his wish that those pages had been perfectly clear of every thing which could even *appear* to justify such a charge.

In the fourth essay, it was not intended to take a comprehensive or systematic view of the causes which are injurious to evangelical religion, but simply to select a few which had particularly excited the author's attention. One or two more would have been specified, if the essay had not been already too long.

ESSAY I.

On a Man's writing Memoirs of himself.

LETTER I.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

EVERY one knows with what interest it is natural to retrace the course of our own lives. The past states and periods of a man's being are retained in a connexion with the present by that principle of self-love, which is unwilling to relinquish its hold on what has once been his. Though he cannot but be sensible of how little consequence his life can have been in the creation, compared with many other trains of events, yet he has felt it more important to himself than all other trains together; and you will very rarely find him tired of narrating again the little history, or at least the favourite parts of the little history, of himself.

To turn this partiality to some account, I recollect having proposed to two or three of my friends that they should write, each principally however for his own use, memoirs of their own

lives, endeavouring not so much to enumerate the mere facts and events of life, as to discriminate the successive states of the mind, and the progress of character. It is in this progress that we acknowledge the chief importance of life to consist; but even as supplying a constant series of interests to the passions, and separately from every consideration of moral and intellectual discipline, we have all accounted our life an inestimable possession, which it deserved incessant cares and labours to retain, and which continues in most cases to be still held with anxious attachment. What has been the object of so much partiality, and has been delighted and pained by so many emotions, might claim, even if the highest interest were out of the question, that a short memorial should be retained by him who has possessed it, has seen it all to this moment depart, and can never recall it.

To write memoirs of many years, as twenty, thirty, or forty, seems at the first glance a ponderous task. Perhaps to reap the products of so many acres of earth indeed might, to one person, be an undertaking of mighty toil. But the materials of any value that all past life can supply to a recording pen, would be reduced by a discerning selection to a very small and modest amount. How much more than one page of moderate size would be deemed by any man's self-importance to be due, on an average, to each of the days that he has lived? No man would judge more than one in ten thousand of all his thoughts, sayings and actions worthy to be mentioned, if memory

were capable of recalling them. Necessarily a very large portion of what has occupied the successive years of life was of a kind to be utterly useless for a history of it; because it was merely for the accommodation of the time. Perhaps in the space of forty years, millions of sentences are proper to be uttered, and many thousands of affairs requisite to be transacted, or of journies to be performed, which it would be ridiculous to record. They are a kind of material for the common expenditure and waste of the day. And yet it is often by a detail of this subordinate economy of life, that the works of fiction, the narratives of age, the journals of travellers, and even grave biographical accounts, attain their wonderful length. As well might a chronicle of the coats that a man has worn, with the colour and date of each, be called his life, for any important uses of relating its history. As well might a man of whom I inquire the dimensions the internal divisions and the use of some remarkable building, begin to tell me how much wood was employed in the scaffolding, where the mortar was prepared, or how often it rained while the work was proceeding.

But, in a deliberate review of all that we can remember of past life, it will be possible to select a certain proportion which may with the most propriety be deemed the history of the man. What I am recommending is to follow the order of time, and reduce your recollections, from the earliest period to the present, into as simple a statement and explanation as you can, of your feel-

ings, opinions and habits, and of the principal circumstances through each stage that have influenced them, till they have become at last what they now are.

Whatever tendencies nature may justly be deemed to have imparted in the first instance, you would probably find the greater part of the moral constitution of your being composed of the contributions of many years and events, consolidated by degrees into what we call character; and by investigating the progress of the accumulation, you would be assisted to judge more clearly how far the materials are valuable, the mixture congruous, and the whole conformation worthy to remain unaltered. With respect to any friend that greatly interests us, we have always a curiosity to obtain an accurate account of the past train of his life and feelings; and though there may be several reasons for such a wish, it partly springs from a consciousness how much this retrospective knowledge would assist to decide or confirm our estimate of that friend—but our estimate of ourselves is of more serious consequence.

The elapsed periods of life acquire importance too from the prospect of its continuance. The smallest thing becomes respectable, when regarded as the commencement of what has advanced, or is advancing, into magnificence. The first rude settlement of Romulus would have been an insignificant circumstance, and might justly have sunk into oblivion, if Rome had not at length commanded the world. The little rill, near the

source of one of the great American rivers, is an interesting object to the traveller who is apprised, as he steps across it, or walks a few miles along its bank, that this is the stream which runs so far, and which gradually swells into so immense a flood. So, while I anticipate the endless progress of life, and wonder through what unknown scenes it is to take its course, its past years lose that character of vanity which would seem to belong to a train of fleeting, perishing moments, and I see them assuming the dignity of a commencing eternity. In them I have *begun* to be that conscious existence which I *am* to be through infinite duration; and I feel a strange emotion of curiosity about this little life in which I am setting out on such a progress; I cannot be content without an accurate sketch of the windings thus far of a stream which is to bear me on for ever. I try to imagine how it will be to recollect, at a far distant point of my era, what I was when here; and I wish, if it were possible, to retain, as I advance, the whole course of my existence within the scope of clear reflection; to fix in my mind so very strong an idea of what I have been in this original period of my time, that I shall most completely possess this idea in ages too remote for calculation.

The review becomes still more important, when I learn the influence which this first part of the progress will have on the happiness or misery of the next.

One of the greatest difficulties in the way of executing the proposed task will have been caus-

ed by the extreme deficiency of that self-observation, which, to any extent, is no common employment, either of youth or any later age. Men realize their existence in the surrounding objects that act upon them and form the *interests* of self, rather than in that very *self*, that interior being, which is thus acted upon. So that this being itself, with its thoughts and feelings, as distinct from the objects of those thoughts and feelings, but rarely occupies its own deep and patient attention. Men carry their minds as they carry their watches, content to be ignorant of the mechanism of their movements, and satisfied with attending to the little exterior circle of things, to which the passions, like indexes, are pointing. It is surprising to see how little self-knowledge a person not watchfully observant of himself may have gained in the whole course of an active, or even an inquisitive life. He may have lived almost an age, and traversed a continent, minutely examining its curiosities, and interpreting the half-obliterated characters on its monuments, unconscious the while of a process operating on his own mind to impress or to erase characteristics of much more importance to him than all the figured brass or marble that Europe contains. After having explored many a cavern or dark ruinous avenue, he may have left undetected a darker recess in his character. He may have conversed with many people, in different languages, on numberless subjects ; but, having neglected those conversations with himself by which his whole moral being should have been kept contin-

ually disclosed to his view, he is better qualified perhaps to describe the intrigues of a foreign court, or the progress of a foreign trade; to represent the manners of the Italians, or the Turks; to narrate the proceedings of the Jesuits, or the adventures of the gypsies; than to write the history of his own mind.

If we had practised habitual self-observation, we could not have failed to make important discoveries. There have been thousands of feelings, each of which, if strongly seized upon, and made the subject of reflection, would have shewn us what our character was, and what it was likely to become. There have been numerous incidents, which operated on us as tests, and so fully brought out the whole quality of the mind, that another person, who should have been discriminatively observing us, would instantly have formed a decided estimate. But unfortunately the mind is generally too much occupied by the feeling or the incident itself, to have the slightest care or consciousness that any thing *could* be learnt, or *is* disclosed. In very early youth it is almost inevitable for it to be thus lost to itself even amidst its own feelings, and the external objects of attention; but it seems a contemptible thing, and it certainly is a criminal and dangerous thing, for a man in mature life to allow himself this thoughtless escape from self-examination.

We have not only neglected to observe what our feelings indicated, but have also in a very great degree ceased to remember what they were.

We may justly wonder how our minds could pass away successively from so many scenes and moments which seemed to us important, each in its time, and retain so slight an impression, that we have now nothing to think about what once excited our utmost emotion. As to my own mind, I perceive that it is becoming uncertain of the exact nature of many feelings of considerable interest, even of later years; of course, the remembrance of what was felt in early life is exceedingly faint. I have just been observing several children of eight or ten years old, in all the active vivacity which enjoys the plenitude of the moment without "looking before or after;" and while observing, I attempted, but without success, to recollect what I was at that age. I can indeed remember the principal events of the period, and the actions and projects to which my feelings impelled me; but the feelings themselves, in their own pure juvenility, cannot be revived, so as to be described and placed in comparison with those of maturity. What is become of all those vernal fancies which had so much power to touch the heart? What a number of sentiments have lived and revelled in the soul that are now irrevocably gone. They died, like the singing birds of that time, which now sing no more.

The life that we then had, now seems almost as if it could not have been our own. When we go back to it in thought, and endeavour to recall the interests which animated it, they will not come. We are like a man returning, after

the absence of many years, to visit the embowered cottage where he passed the morning of his life, and finding only a relic of its ruins.

But many of the propensities which still continue, probably originated then; and our not being able to explore them up to those remote sources renders a *complete* investigation of our moral and intellectual characters for ever impossible. How little, in those years, we were aware, when we met with the incident, or heard the conversation, or saw the spectacle, or felt the emotion, which were the first causes of some of the chief permanent tendencies of future life, how much we might, long afterward, wish to ascertain the origin of those tendencies, and how much in vain. But if we cannot absolutely reach their origin, it will however be interesting to trace them back through all the circumstances which have increased their strength.

In some occasional states of the mind, we can look back much more clearly, and to a much greater distance, than at other times. I would advise to seize those short intervals of illumination which sometimes occur without our knowing the cause, and in which the genuine aspect of some remote event, or long-forgotten image, is recovered with extreme distinctness by vivid, spontaneous glimpses of thought, such as no effort could have commanded; as the sombre features and minute objects of a distant ridge of hills become strikingly visible in the strong gleams of light which transiently fall on them. An instance of this kind occurred to me but a

few hours since, while reading what had no perceptible connexion with a circumstance of my early youth, which probably I have not recollected for many years, and which had no unusual interest at the time that it happened. That circumstance came suddenly to my mind with a clearness of representation which I was not able to retain for the length of an hour, and which I could not by the strongest effort at this instant renew. I seemed almost to *see* the walls and windows of a particular room, with four or five persons in it, who were so perfectly restored to my imagination, that I could recognise not only the features, but even the momentary expressions of their countenances, and the tones of their voices.

According to different states of the mind too, retrospect appears longer or shorter. It may happen that some memorable circumstance of very early life shall be so powerfully recalled as to contract the wide intervening space, by banishing from the view, a little while, all the series of intermediate remembrances; but when this one object of memory retires again to its remoteness and indifference, and all the others resume their proper places and distances, the retrospect appears long.

Places and things which have an association with any of the events or feelings of past life, will greatly assist the recollection of them. A man of strong associations finds memoirs of himself already written on the places where he has conversed with happiness or misery. If an old

man wished to animate for a moment the languid and faded ideas which he retains of his youth, he might walk with his crutch across the green where he once played with companions who are now probably laid to repose in another spot not far off. An aged saint may meet again some of the affecting ideas of his early piety in the place where he first thought it happy to pray. A walk in a meadow, the sight of a bank of flowers, perhaps even of some one flower, a landscape with the tints of autumn, the descent into a valley, the brow of a mountain, the house where a friend has been met, or has resided, or has died, have often produced a much more lively recollection of our past feelings, and of the objects and events which caused them, than the most perfect description could have done; and we have lingered a considerable time for the pensive luxury of thus resuming, if I may so express it, the departed state of our minds.

But there are many to whom local associations present images which they fervently wish they could forget; images which haunt the places where crimes have been perpetrated, and which seem to approach and glare on the criminal as he hastily passes by, especially if in the evening or the night. No local associations are so impressive as those of guilt. It may here be observed, that as each one has his own separate remembrances, giving to some places an aspect and a significance which he alone can perceive, there must be an unknown number of pleasing, or mournful, or dreadful associations, spread

over the scenes inhabited or visited by men. We pass without any awakened consciousness by the bridge, or the wood, or the house, where there is something to excite the most painful or frightful ideas in the next man that shall come that way, or possibly the companion that walks along with us. How much there is in a thousand spots of the earth, that is invisible and silent to all but the conscious individual.

> I hear a voice you cannot hear;
> I see a hand you cannot see.

LETTER II.

We may regard our past life as a continued, though irregular course of education; and the discipline has consisted of instruction, companionship, reading, and the diversified influences of the world. The young mind eagerly came forward to meet the operation of some of these modes of dicipline, though without the possiblity of a thought concerning the important process under which it was begmning to pass. In some certain degree we have been influenced by each of these parts of the great system of education; it will be worth while to inquire how far, and in what manner.

Few persons can look back to the early period when they were peculiarly the subjects of in-

struction, without a regret for themselves, (which may be extended to the human race,) that the result of instruction, excepting that which leads to evil, bears so small a proportion to its compass and repetition. Yet *some* good consequence will follow the diligent inculcation of truth and precept on the youthful mind; and our consciousness of possessing certain advantages derived from it will be a partial consolation in the review that will comprise so many proofs of its comparative inefficacy. You can recollect perhaps the instructions to which you feel yourself permanently the most indebted, and some of those which produced the greatest effect on your mind at the time, those which surprised, delighted, or mortified you. You can remember the facility or difficulty of understanding, the facility or difficulty of believing, and the practical inferences which you drew from principles, on the strength of your own reason, and sometimes in variance with those made by your instructors. You can remember what views of truth and duty were most frequently and cogently presented, what passions were appealed to, what arguments were employed, and which had the greatest influence. Perhaps your present idea of the most convincing and persuasive mode of instruction may be derived from your early experience of the manner of those persons, with whose opinions you felt it the most easy and delightful to harmonize, who gave you the most agreeable consciousness of your faculties expanding to the light, like morning flowers, and who, assuming the least of dic-

tation, exerted the greatest degree of power. You can recollect the submissiveness with which your mind yielded to instructions as from an oracle, or the hardihood with which you dared to examine and oppose them. You can remember how far they became, as to your own conduct, an internal authority of reason and conscience, when you were not under the inspection of those who inculcated them; and what classes of persons or things around you they induced you to dislike or approve. And you can perhaps imperfectly trace the manner and the particulars in which they sometimes aided, or sometimes counteracted, those other influences which have a far stronger efficacy on the character than instruction can boast.

Most persons, I presume, can recollect some few sentences or conversations which made so deep an impression, perhaps in some instances they can scarcely tell why, that they have been thousands of times recalled, while all the rest have been forgotten; or they can advert to some striking incident, coming in aid of instruction, or being of itself a forcible instruction, which they seem even now to see as clearly as when it happened, and of which they will retain a perfect idea to the end of life. The most remarkable circumstances of this kind deserve to be recorded in the supposed memoirs. In some instances, to recollect the instructions of a former period will be to recollect too the excellence, the affection, and the death, of the persons who gave them. Amidst the sadness of such a remembrance, it will be a

consolation that they are not entirely lost to us. Wise monitions, when they return on us with this melancholy charm, have more pathetic cogency than when they were first uttered by the voice of a living friend who is now silent. It will be an interesting occupation of the pensive hour, to recount the advantages which we have received from beings who have left the world, and to reinforce our virtues from the dust of those who first taught them.

In our review, we shall find that the companions of our childhood, and of each succeeding period, have had a great influence on our characters. A creature so conformable as man, and at the same time so capable of being moulded into partial dissimilarity by social antipathies, cannot have conversed with his fellow beings thousands of hours, walked with them thousands of miles, undertaken with them numberless enterprises smaller and greater, and had every passion by turns awakened in their company, without being immensely affected by all this association. A large share indeed of the social interest may have been of so common a kind, and with persons of so common an order, that the effect on the character has been too little peculiar to be strikingly perceptible during the progress. We were not sensible of it, till we came to some of those circumstances and changes in life, which make us aware of the state of our minds by the manner in which new objects are acceptable or repulsive to them. On removing into a new circle of society, for instance, we could perceive, by the number

of things in which we found ourselves uncongenial with the new acquaintance, the modification which our sentiments had received in the preceding social intercourse. But in some instances we have been sensible, in a very short time, of a powerful force operating on our opinions, tastes, and habits, and throwing them into a new order. This effect is inevitable, if a young susceptible mind happens to become familiarly acquainted with a person in whom a strongly individual cast of character is sustained and dignified by uncommon mental resources; and it may be found that, generally, the greatest measure of effect has been produced by the influence of a very small number of persons; often of one only, whose extended and interesting mind had more power to surround and assimilate a young ingenious being, than the collective influence of a multitude of the persons, whose characters were moulded in the manufactory of custom, and sent forth like images of clay of kindred shape and varnish from a pottery. I am supposing, all along, that the person who writes memoirs of himself, is conscious of something more peculiar than a mere dull resemblance of that ordinary form of character, for which it would seem hardly worth while to have been a man. As to the crowd of those who are faithfully stamped, like bank-notes, with the same marks, with the difference only of being worth more guineas or fewer, they are mere particles of a class, mere pieces and bits of the great vulgar or the small; *they* need not write their history, it may be found in the newspaper-

chronicle, or the gossip's or the sexton's narrative.

It is obvious, in what I have suggested respecting the research through past life, that all the persons who are recalled to the mind, as having had an influence on us, must stand before it in judgment. It is impossible to examine our moral and intellectual growth without forming an estimate, as we proceed, of those who retarded, advanced, or perverted it. Our dearest relatives and friends cannot be exempted. There will be occasionally the necessity of blaming where we wish to give entire praise; though perhaps some worthy motives and generous feelings may, at the same time, be discovered in the conduct where they had hardly been perceived or allowed before. But, at any rate, it is important that in no instance the judgment be duped into delusive estimates, amidst the examination, and so as to deprave the principles of the examination by which we mean to bring ourselves to rigorous justice. For if any indulgent partiality, or mistaken idea of that duty which requires a kind and candid feeling to accompany the clearest discernment of defects, may be permitted to beguile our judgments out of the decisions of justice in favour of others, self-love, a more indulgent and partial feeling than all besides, will not fail to practise the same beguilement in favour of ourselves. But indeed it would seem impossible, besides being absurd, to apply one set of principles to judge of our-

selves, and another to judge of those with whom we have associated.

Every person of tolerable education has been considerably influenced by the books which he has read; and remembers with a kind of gratitude several of those that made the earliest and the strongest impression. It is pleasing at a more advanced period to look into the early favourites again; though the mature person may wonder how some of them had once power to absorb his passions, make him retire into a lonely wood in order to read unmolested, repel the approaches of sleep, or infect it with visions when it came. A capital part of the proposed task would be to recollect the books that have been read with the greatest interest, the periods when they were read, the succession of them, the partiality which any of them inspired to a particular mode of life, to a study, to a system of opinions, or to a class of human characters, and the counteraction of later ones (where we have been sensible of it) to the effect produced by the former; and then, to endeavour to estimate the whole and ultimate influence.

Considering the multitude of facts, sentiments, and characters, which have been contemplated by a person who has read much, the effect, one should think, must have been very great. Still however it is probable that a very small number of books will have the pre-eminence in our mental history. Perhaps your memory will promptly recur to six or ten that have contributed more to your present habits of feeling and thought than

all the rest together. And here it may be observed, that when a few books of the same kind have pleased us emphatically, they too often form an almost exclusive taste, which is carried through all future reading, and is pleased only with books of that kind.

It might be supposed that the scenes of nature, an amazing assemblage of phænomena, if their effect were not lost through familiarity, would have a powerful influence on all opening minds, and transfuse into the internal economy of ideas and sentiment something of a character and a colour correspondent to the beauty, vicissitude, and grandeur, which continually press on the senses. On minds of genius they often have this effect; and Beattie's Minstrel may be as just as it is a fascinating description of the feelings of such a mind. But on the greatest number this influence operates feebly; you will not see the process in children, nor the result in mature persons. The charms of nature are objects only of sight and hearing, not of sensibility and imagination. And even the sight and hearing do not receive impressions sufficiently distinct or forcible for clear recollection; it is not therefore strange that these impressions seldom go so much deeper than the senses as to awaken pensiveness or enthusiasm, and fill the mind with an interior permanent scenery of beautiful images at its own command. This defect of fancy and sensibility is unfortunate amidst a creation infinitely rich with grand and beautiful objects, which, imparting something more than

images to a mind adapted and habituated to converse with nature, inspire an exquisite sentiment that seems like the emanation of a spirit residing in them: It is unfortunate, I have thought within these few minutes, while looking out on one of the most enchanting nights of the most interesting season of the year, and hearing the voices of a company of persons, to whom I can perceive that this soft and solemn shade over the earth, the calm sky, the beautiful stripes of cloud, the stars, and the waning moon just risen, are all blank and indifferent. I feel no vanity in this instance; for probably several thousand aspects of night, not less striking than this, have appeared before my eyes and departed, not only without awaking emotion, but without attracting notice.

If minds in general are not made to be strongly affected by the phænomena of the earth and heavens, they are however all subject to be powerfully influenced by the appearances and character of the *human* world. I suppose a child in Switzerland, growing up to a man, would have acquired incomparably more of the cast of his mind from the events, manners, and actions, of the next village, though its inhabitants were but his occasional companions, than from all the mountain-scenes, the cataracts, and every circumstance of beauty or sublimity in nature around him. We are all true to our species, and very soon feel its importance to us, (though benevolence be not the basis of the interest,) far beyond the importance of any thing that we see

besides. You may have observed how instantly even children will turn their attention away from any of the more ample aspects of nature, however rare or striking, if human objects present themselves to view in any active manner. This "leaning to our kind" brings each individual not only under the influence attending direct companionship with a few, but under the operation of numberless influences from all the moral diversities of which he is a spectator in the living world,—a complicated though often insensible tyranny, of which every fashion, folly, and vice, may exercise its part.

Some persons would be able, in the review of life, to recollect very strong and influential impressions made, even in almost the first years of it, by some of the facts which they witnessed in surrounding society. I do not know whether you can; but at least you can retrace your most remarkable views of mankind for a considerable number of years, which have extended your attention beyond the confined population of a neighbourhood, and have given you such access to the wider living world, as to enable you to form your opinions of it from the actual reality, without the aid of moralists, satirists, or writers of novels. And this simple circumstance, that in viewing mankind you have been led to the adoption of many of your opinions, is one illustration of the influence which the world has had on you; it has been so far the creator of your mental economy. But the operation has not stopped here; the living world will not confine itself to occupying the understanding, and yield to be a mere subject for

judgments to be formed upon; but all the while that its judge is directing upon it the exercise of his understanding, it is re-actively throwing on him various moral influences and infections.

LETTER III.

A PERSON, capable of being deeply interested, and who is accustomed to reflect on his feelings, will have observed in himself this subjection to the influences of what has been presented to him in society; and will acknowledge that in one or a few instances they have seemed, at the time, of sufficient force to go far toward new-moulding the whole habit of the mind. Recollect your own experience. After witnessing some remarkable transaction, or some new and strange department of life and manners, or some striking disclosure of character, or after listening to some extraordinary conversation, or impressive recital of facts, you have been conscious that what you have heard or seen has given your mind some one strong determination, of a nature directly resulting from the quality of this cause. Though the dispositions already existing must no doubt have been prepared to receive the operation of this new cause in one certain manner, (since every one would not have been affected in the same manner,) yet the feelings have been thrown into an order so different, that you seemed to have ac-

quired a new moral being. The difference has been not merely in their temporary energy, but also in their direction. In the state thus suddenly formed, some of the dispositions of which you had been conscious before, seemed to be lost, while others that previously had little strength, were grown into an imperious prevalence; or even a new one appeared to have been originated*. While this state continues, a person is another character; and if the moral tendency thus excited or created were prolonged through the sequel of his life, the latter part of it might so little resemble the former, that he would not, except by his person, or by local circumstances, be recognised for the same, while an observer who should not know the cause, would be perplexed and surprised at the difference. Now this difference might actually be in a great measure realized, if the impression which gives this temporary direction to his mind, were so intensely powerful as to haunt him ever after; or if he were subjected to a long succession of impressions of the same tendency, without any opposite or strongly different ones intervening to break the process.

You have witnessed perhaps a scene of injustice and oppression, and have retired with an indignation which has tempted you to imprecate vengeance. Now supposing that the hateful image of this scene were to be revived in your mind for a long time, as often as any iniquitous circumstance in society presents itself to your notice,

* So great an effect however as this is perhaps rarely experienced from even the most powerful causes, except in early life.

and that you had an entire persuasion that your feeling was the pure indignation of virtue; or, supposing that you were repeatedly to witness similar instances, without your emotion becoming languid by familiarity with them, the consequence might be that you would acquire the spirit of Draco or Minos.

It is easy to imagine the impression of a few atrocious facts on a mind of ardent passions converting a humane horror of cruelty into the vindictive fanaticism of Montbar the Buccaneer*; and I have known instances of a similar effect, in a fainter degree. A person of gentler sensibility, by accidentally witnessing a scene of distress of which none of the circumstances caused disgust toward the sufferers, or indignation against others as the cause of the sorrow, having once tasted the pleasure of soothing woes which perhaps death alone can remove, might be led to seek other instances of distress, acquire both an aptitude and a partiality for the friendly office, and become a pensive philanthropist. The strong disgust, excited by some extravagance of ostentatious wealth, or some excess of dissipated frivolity, and awaked again at every succeeding and inferior instance of the same kind, with a much stronger aversion than would have been excited in these inferior instances, if the disgusted feeling did not run into the vestiges of the first indelible impression, may produce a cynic or a miser, a recluse or a philosopher. Numberless other illustrations might be brought to shew how much the characters of human beings, entering

* See Abbé Raynal's History of the Indies.

on life, with such unwarned carelessness of heart, are at the mercy of the incalculable influences which may strike them from any point of the surrounding world.

It is true that, notwithstanding so many influences are acting on men, and some of them apparently of a kind and of a force to produce in their subjects a striking peculiarity, very few characters strongly marked from all around them are found to arise. In looking on a large company of persons whose dispositions and pursuits are substantially alike, we cannot doubt that several of them have met with circumstances, of which the natural tendency must have been to give them a determination of mind extremely dissimilar to the character of those whom they now so much resemble. And why does the influence of such circumstances fail to produce such a result? Partly, because the influences of a more peculiar and specific operation are overborne and lost in that wide general influence which accumulates and conforms each individual to the crowd; and partly, because even if there were no such general influence to steal away the impressions of a more peculiar tendency, very few minds are of so fixed and faithful a consistence as to retain, in continued efficacy, impressions of a kind which the common course of life is not adapted to reinforce, nor prevailing example to confirm. In general, the mind, if attempted to be wrought into any boldly specific form, proves like a half-fluid substance, in which angles, or circles, or any other figures, may be cut, but which recovers, while you are looking, its for-

mer state, and closes them up; or like a quantity of dust, which may be raised into momentary reluctant shapes, but which is relapsing even amidst the operation towards its undefined mass. So far however as the belonging to some one numerous *class* of this great crowd, distinguished by its predominant quality, may constitute a marked character, there are many so distinguished. There are many decidedly avaricious, many devoted slaves of fashion, and many specimens of Lilliputian ambition, little Alexanders of a molehill, as there was one great Alexander of a world. And it is a melancholy illustration of the final basis of character, that is, human nature itself, that both the distinctions which designate a bad class, and those which constitute a bad individual peculiarity, are attained with far the greatest frequency, and incomparably the greatest facility. While however I have the most entire conviction of this mighty inclination to evil, which is the grand cause of all the diversified forms of evil, and while, at the same time, I cannot divest myself of the vulgar belief of a great native difference between different men, in those original principles which are to be unfolded by the progress of time into intellectual powers and moral dispositions; I yet cannot but perceive that the *immediate* causes of the greater portion of the prominent *actual* character of human beings are to be found in those moral elements through which they pass. And if I might indulge so fanciful an idea as that of its being possible for a man to live back again to his infancy, through all the scenes of his life, and to give back from his

mind and character, at each time and circumstance, as he repassed it, exactly that which he took from it, when he was there before, it would be most curious to see the fragments and *exuviæ* of the moral man, lying here and there along the retrograde path, and to find what he was in the beginning of this train of modifications and acquisitions. Nor can it be doubted that any man, though his original tendencies (which possibly have been brought under a series of events calculated to favour their developement) were ever so defined, might, by being led through a different train, opposite to those native tendencies, have been now an extremely different man from what he is, even the measure of his intellectual cultivation being the same.

Here a person even of your age might pause, and look back with great interest on the world of circumstances through which life has been drawn. Consider what thousands of situations, appearances, incidents, persons, you have been present to, each in its moment. The review will present to you something like a chaos, with all the moral, and all other elements, confounded together; and you may reflect till you begin almost to wonder how an individual retains even the same essence through all the diversities, vicissitudes, and counteractions of influence, that operate on it during its progress through the confusion. But though its essence is the same, and might defy an universe to extinguish, absorb, or change it; its modification, its condition, and habits, will shew where it has been, and what it has undergone. You may descry on it the

marks and colours of many of the things by which, in passing, it has been touched or arrested.

Consider the number of meetings with acquaintance, friends, or strangers; the number of conversations you have held or heard; the number of exhibitions of good or evil, virtue or vice; the number of occasions on which you have been disgusted or pleased, moved to admiration or to abhorrence; the number of times that you have contemplated the town, the rural cottage, or verdant fields; the number of volumes that you have read; the times that you have looked over the present state of the world, or gone by means of history into past ages; the number of comparisons of yourself with other persons, alive or dead, and comparisons of them with one another; the number of solitary musings, of solemn contemplations of night, of the successive subjects of thought, and of animated sentiments that have been kindled and extinguished. Add all the hours and causes of sorrow that you have known. Through this lengthened, and, if the number could be told, stupendous, multiplicity of things, you have advanced, while all their heterogeneous myriads have darted influences upon you, each one of them having some definable tendency. A traveller round the globe would not meet a greater variety of seasons, prospects, and winds, than you might have recorded of the circumstances affecting the progress of your character, in your moral journey. You could not wish to have drawn to yourself the agency of a vaster diversity of causes; you could not wish, on the supposition that you had

gained advantage from all these, to wear the spoils of a greater number of regions. The formation of the character from so many materials reminds one of that mighty appropriating attraction, which, on the hypothesis that the resurrection shall re-assemble the same particles which composed the body before, will draw them from dust, and trees, and animals, and ocean, and winds.

It would scarcely be expected that a being which should be conducted through such anarchy of discipline, in which the endless crowd of influential powers seem waiting, each to take away what the last had given, should be permitted to acquire, or to retain, any settled form of qualities at all. The more probable result would be, either several qualities disagreeing with one another, or a blank neutrality. And in fact, a great number of such neutralities are found every where; persons who, unless, as I have before observed, their sharing of the general properties of human nature, a little modified by the insignificant distinction of some large class, can be called character, have no character. It is therefore somewhat strange, if you and if other individuals have come forth with moral features of a strongly marked and consistently combined cast, from the infinity of miscellaneous impressions. If the process has been so complex, how comes the result to be so simple? How has it happened that the *collective* effect of these numerous and jarring operations on your mind, is that which only a *few* of these operations were adapted to produce, and quite different from that which many others of them would naturally have produced, and do

actually produce in many other persons? Here you will perceive that some one capital determination must long since have been by some means established in your mind, and that, during your progress, this grand determination has kept you susceptible of the effect of some influences, and in a great measure fortified against many others. Now what was the prevailing determination, whence did it come, how did it acquire its power? Was it an original tendency and insuppressible impulse of your nature; or the result of your earliest impressions; or of some one class of impressions repeated oftener than any other; or of one single impression of extreme force? What was it, and whence did it come? This is the great secret in the history of character; for, it is scarcely necessary to observe, that as soon as the mind is under the power of a predominant tendency, the difficulty of growing into the maturity of that form of character which this tendency promotes or creates, is substantially over. Because, when a determining principle is become predominant, it not only produces a partial insensibility to all impressions that would counteract it, but also continually augments its own ascendency, by means of a faculty or fatality of finding out every thing, and attracting and meeting every impression, that is adapted to coalesce with it and strengthen it; like the instinct of animals which instantly selects from the greatest variety of substances those which are fit for their nutriment. Let a man have some leading and decided propensity, and it will be surprising to see how many more things he will find, and how ma-

ny more events will happen, than any one could have imagined, of a nature to reinforce it. And sometimes even circumstances which seemed of an entirely counteractive order, are strangely seduced by this predominant principle into an operation that confirms it; just in the same manner as polemics most self-complacently avow their opinions to be more firmly established by all that the opponent has objected.

It would be easy to enlarge almost without end on the influences of the surrounding world in forming the character of each individual; and no one would deny that to a considerable extent such a representation is true. But yet a man may be unwilling to allow that he has been quite so servilely passive as he would probably find that he has been, if it were possible for him to make a complete examination. He may be disposed to think that his reason has been an independent power, has kept a strict watch and passed a right judgment on his moral progress, has met the circumstances of the external world on terms of examination and authority, and has *permitted* only such impressions to be received, or at least only such consequences to follow from them, as it wisely approved. But I would tell him that he has been a very extraordinary man, if the greater part of his time has not been spent entirely without a thought of reflecting *what* impressions were made on him, and what was their tendency; and even without a consciousness that the effect of any impressions was of importance to his moral habits. He may be assured that he has been subjected to many gentle, gradual pro-

cesses, and has met many critical occasions, on which, and on the consequences of which, he formed no opinions. And again, it is unfortunately true, that even should attention be awake, and opinions be formed, the faculty which forms them is very servile to the other parts of the human constitution. If it could be extrinsic to the man, a kind of domestic Pythia, or an attendant genius, like the demon of Socrates, it might then be a dignified regulator of the influences which are acting on his character, to decide what should not affect him, what should affect him, and in what way; though even then, its disapproving dictates would often be inefficacious against the powerful impressions which create an impulse in the mind, and the repetition of them which confirms that impulse into a habit. But the case is, that this faculty, though mocked with imperial names, being condemned to dwell in the mind in the company of far more active powers than itself and earlier exercised, becomes humbly obsequious to them. The passions easily beguile this majestic reason into neglect, or bribe it into acquiescence, or repress it into silence, while *they* receive the impressions, and while *they* acquire from those impressions that determinate direction which will constitute the character. If, after thus much is done during the weakness, or without the notice, or without the leave, or under the connivance or corruption of the judgment, it be called upon to perform its part, it must act under the full established influence of those very impressions of which its office was to have previously decided whether they should not be strenuous-

ly repelled. Thus its opinions will unconsciously be perverted; like the answers of the ancient oracles, dictated to the imaginary god by beings of a very terrestrial sort, though the sly intervention could not be perceived. It is quite a vulgar observation in what a wonderfully favourable manner each man sincerely thinks of the principal features of his own character, though *you* laugh at the gravity of his persuasion that his tastes, preferences, and qualities, have on the whole grown up under the sacred and faithful guardianship of judgment, while in fact his judgment has accepted every bribe that has been offered to betray him.

LETTER IV.

You will agree with me, I believe, that in a comprehensive view of the influences which have formed, and are forming, the characters of men, we shall find, religion excepted, but little cause to felicitate our species. Make the supposition that any given number of persons, a hundred for instance, taken promiscuously, should be able to write memoirs of themselves so clear and perfect as to explain, to your discernment at least, if not to their own consciousness, the entire process by which their minds have attained their present state, recounting all the most impressive circumstances. If they should read these me-

moirs to you in succession, while your benevolence, and the moral principles according to which you felt and estimated, were kept at the highest pitch, you would often during the disclosure regret to observe how many things may be the causes of irretrievable mischief. Why is the path of life, you would say, so haunted as if with evil spirits of every diversity of noxious agency, some of which may patiently accompany, or others of which may suddenly cross, the unfortunate wanderer? And you would regret to observe into how many forms of intellectual and moral perversion the human mind readily yields itself to be modified.

As *one* of the number concluded the account of himself, you might be impelled to say, I compassionate you; I perceive the process under which you have become a misanthropist. If your juvenile ingenuous ardour had not been chilled on your entrance into society, where your most favourite sentiments were not at all comprehended by some, and by others deemed wise and proper enough—perhaps for the moon; if you had not felt the mortification of relatives being uncongenial, of persons whom you were anxious to render happy being indifferent to your kindness, or of apparent friendships proving treacherous or transitory; if you had not met with such striking instances of hopeless stupidity in the vulgar, or of vain self-importance in the learned, or of the coarse or supercilious arrogance of the persons whose manners were always regulated by the consideration of the number of guineas by which they were better than

you; if your mortifications had not given you a keen faculty of perceiving the all-pervading selfishness of mankind, while, in addition, you had perhaps a peculiar opportunity to observe the apparatus of systematic villany by which combinations of men are able to arm their selfishness to oppress or ravage the world—you might even now perhaps have been the persuasive instructor of beings, concerning whom you are wondering why they should have been made in the form of rationals; you might have conciliated to yourself and to goodness, where you repel and are repelled; you might have been the apostle and pattern of benevolence, instead of the grim solitaire. Yet not that the world should bear all the blame. Frail and changeable in virtue, you *might* perhaps have been good under a series of auspicious circumstances; but the glory had been to be victoriously good against malignant ones. Moses lost none of his generous concern for a people, on whom *you* would have invoked the waters of Noah or the fires of Sodom to return; and that Greater than Moses, who endured from men such a matchless excess of injustice, while for their sake alone he sojourned and suffered on earth, was not alienated to live a misanthropist, nor to die one.

A *second* sketch might exhibit external circumstances not producing any effect more serious than an intellectual stagnation. When it was concluded, you might be tempted to say, If I did not know that mental freedom is a dangerous thing in situations where the possessor would feel it a *singular* attainment; and if I did not prefer

even the quiescence of unexamining belief, where the *effects* are pure, to the indifference or scepticism which feels no assurance or no importance in any belief, or to the weak presumption that darts into the newest and most daring opinions as *therefore* true—I should deplore that your life was destined to preserve its sedate course so entirely unanimated by the intellectual novelties of the age, the restless agitations of ever-moving opinion, and under the habitual and exclusive influence of one individual, worthy perhaps, and in a certain degree sensible, but of unenlarged views, whom you have been taught and accustomed to regard as the comprehensive repository of all the truth requisite for you to know, and from whom you have derived, as some of your chief acquisitions, an assurance of the labour of inquiry being needless, and a superstitious horror of innovation, without even knowing what points are threatened by it.

At the end of *another's* disclosure, you would say, How unfortunate that you could not believe there might be respectable and valuable men, that were not born to be wits or poets. And how unfortunate were those first evenings that you were privileged to listen to a company of men, who could *say* more fine things in an hour than their biographers will be able, without a little panegyric fiction, to record them to have *done* in the whole space of life. It was then you discovered that *you* too were of the progeny of Apollo, and that you had been iniquitously transferred at your nativity into the hands of ignorant foster-parents, who had endeavoured to degrade

and confine you to the sphere of regular employments and sober satisfactions. But you would "tower up to the region of your sire." You saw what wonderful things *might* be said on all subjects; you found it not so very difficult to say *different* things from other people; and every thing that was not common dulness, was therefore pointed, every thing that was not vulgar sense, was therefore sublime. You adopted a certain vastitude of phrase, mistaking extravagance of expression for greatness of thought. You set yourself to dogmatize on books, and the abilities of men, but especially on their prejudices; and perhaps to demolish, with the air of an exploit, some of the trite observations and maxims current in society. You awakened and surprised your imagination by imposing on it a strange new tax of colours and metaphors; a tax reluctantly and uncouthly paid, but perhaps in some one instance so luckily, as to gain the applause of these gifted (if they were not merely eccentric) men. This was to you the proof and recognition of fraternity; and it has since been the chief question that has interested you with each acquaintance and in each company, whether they too could perceive what you were so happy to have discovered, yet so anxious that the acknowledgment of others should confirm; your own persuasion however became as pertinacious as ivy climbing a wall. It was almost of course to attend to necessary pursuits with reluctant irregularity, though suffering by the consequences of neglecting them, and to feel indignant that *genius* should be reproached for the dis-

regard of these ordinary duties to which it ought never to have been subjected.

During a *projector's* story of life and misfortunes, you might regret that he should ever have heard of Harrison's timepiece, the perpetual motion, or the Greek fire.

After an *antiquarian's* history, you might be allowed to congratulate yourself on not having fallen under the spell which confines a human soul to inhabit, like a spider in one of the corners, a dusty room consecrated with religious solemnity to old coins, rusty knives, illuminated mass-books, swords and spurs of forgotten kings, and slippers of their queens, with perhaps a Roman helmet, the acquisition of which was the first cause of the collection and of the passion, elevated imperially over the relics of kings and queens and the whole museum, as the eagle once waved over kingdoms and the world. And you might be inclined to say, I wish that helmet had been a pan for charcoal or cinders, or had been put on the head of one of the quiet equestrian warriors in the Tower, or had aided the hauntings and rattlings of the ghost of Sir Godfrey in the baron's castle where he was murdered, or had been worn by Don Quixote instead of the barber's bason, or had been the cauldron of Macbeth's witches, or had been in any other shape, place, or use, rather than dug up an antiquity in a luckless hour in a bank near your garden.

I compassionate you, would, in a *very* benevolent hour, be again your language to the wealthy unfeeling *tyrant of a family and a neighbourhood*, who seeks, in the overawed timidity and unretali-

ated injuries of the unfortunate beings within his power, the gratification that should have been sought in their affections. Unless you had brought into the world some extraordinary refractoriness to the influence of evil, the process that you have undergone could not easily fail of being efficacious. If your parents idolized their own importance in their son so much that they never opposed your inclinations themselves, nor permitted it to be done by any subject to their authority; if the humble companion, sometimes summoned to the honour of amusing you, bore your caprices and insolence with the meekness without which he had lost his enviable privilege; if you could despoil the garden of some harmless dependent neighbour of the carefully reared flowers, and torment his little dog or cat, without his daring to punish you, or to appeal to your infatuated parents; if aged men addressed you in a submissive tone, and with the appellation of "Sir," and their aged wives uttered their wonder at your condescension, and pushed their grandchildren away from around the fire for your sake if you happened, though with a strut of pertness, and your hat on your head, to enter one of their cottages, perhaps to express your contempt of the homely dwelling, furniture, and fare; if, in maturer life, you associated with vile persons who would forego the contest of equality, to be your allies in trampling on inferiors; and if, both then and since, you have been suffered to deem your wealth the compendium or equivalent of every ability and every good quality—it would indeed be immensely strange, if you had not be-

come, in due time, the miscreant, who may thank the power of the laws in civilized society, that he is not assaulted by clubs and stones; to whom one could cordially wish the opportunity and the consequences of attempting his tyranny among some such people as those *submissive* sons of nature in the forests of North America; and whose dependents and domestic relatives may be almost forgiven when they shall one day rejoice at his funeral.

LETTER V.

I WILL immagine only one case more, on which you would emphatically express your compassion, though for one of the most daring beings in the creation, a *contemner of God*, who explodes his laws by denying his existence.

If you were so unacquainted with mankind, that this character might be announced to you as a rare or singular phænomenon, your conjectures, till you saw and heard the man, at the nature and the extent of the discipline through which he must have advanced, would be led toward something extraordinary. And you might think that the term of that discipline must have been very long; since a quick train of impressions, a short series of mental gradations, within the little space of a few months and years, would not seem enough to have matured such supreme

and awful heroism. Surely the creature that thus lifts his voice, and defies all invisible power within the possibilities of infinity, challenging whatever unknown being may hear him, and may appropriate that title of Almighty which is pronounced in scorn, to evince his existence, if he will, by his vengeance, was not as yesterday a little child, that would tremble and cry at the approach of a diminutive reptile.

But indeed it is heroism no longer, if he *knows* that there is no God. The wonder then turns on the great process, by which a man could grow to the immense intelligence that can know that there is no God. What ages and what lights are requisite for THIS attainment! This intelligence involves the very attributes of Divinity, while a God is denied. For unless this man is omnipresent, unless he is at this moment in every place in the universe, he cannot know but there may be in some place manifestations of a Deity by which even *he* would be overpowered. If he does not know absolutely every agent in the universe, the one that he does not know may be God. If he is not himself the chief agent in the universe, and does not know what is so, that which is so may be God. If he is not in absolute possession of all the propositions that constitute universal truth, the one which he wants may be, that there is a God. If he cannot with certainty assign the cause of all that he perceives to exist, that cause may be a God. If he does not know every thing that has been done in the immeasurable ages that are past, some things may have been done by a God. Thus, unless

he knows all things, that is, precludes another Deity by being one himself, he cannot know that the Being whose existence he rejects, does not exist. But he must know that he does not exist, else he deserves equal contempt and compassion for the temerity with which he firmly avows his rejection and acts accordingly. And yet a man of *ordinary* age and intelligence may present himself to you with the avowal of being thus distinguished from the crowd; and if he would describe the manner in which he has attained this eminence, you would feel a melancholy interest in contemplating that process of which the result is so portentous.

If you did not know that there are more than a few such examples, you would say, in viewing this result, I *should* hope this is the consequence of some malignant intervention so occasional that ages may pass away before it return among men; some peculiar conjunction of disastrous influences must have lighted on your selected soul; you have been struck by that energy of evil which acted upon the spirits of Pharaoh and Epiphanes. But give your own description of what you have met with in a world which has been deemed to present in every part the indications of a Deity. Tell of the mysterious voices which have spoken to you from the deeps of the creation, falsifying the expressions marked on its face. Tell of the new ideas which, like meteors passing over the solitary wanderer, gave you the first glimpses of truth while benighted in the common belief of the divine existence. Describe the whole train of causes that have opera-

ted to create and consolidate that state of mind which you carry forward to the great experiment of futurity under a different kind of hazard from all other classes of men.

You would find however that those circumstances, by which even a man who had been presented from his infancy with the ideas of religion, could be elated into a contempt of its great object, were far from being extraordinary. They might have been met by any man, whose mind had been cultivated and exercised enough to feel interested about holding any system of opinions at all, whose pride had been gratified in the consciousness of having the liberty of selecting and changing opinions, and whose habitual assent to the principles of religion had neither the firmness resulting from decisive arguments, nor the warmth of pious affection.* Such a person had

*It will be obvious that I am describing the progress of one of the humbler order of aliens from all religion, and not that by which the great philosophic leaders have ascended the dreary eminence, where they look with so much complacency up to a vacant heaven, and down to the gulph of annihilation. *Their* progress undoubtedly is much more systematic and deliberate, and accompanied often by a laborious speculation, which, though in ever so perverted a train, the mind is easily persuaded to identify, because it *is* laborious, with the search after truth and the love of it. While however it is in a persevering train of thought, and not by the hasty movements of a more vulgar mind, that they pursue their deviation from some of the principles of religion into a final abandonment of it all, they probably are very greatly mistaken, if they assure themselves that the moral causes which contribute to guide and animate their progress are all of a sublime order; and if they could be fully revealed to their own view, they might perhaps be severely mortified to find what vulgar motives, while they were despising vulgar men, have ruled their intellectual career. Pride, which idolizes self, which revolts at every thing that comes in the form of *dictates*, and exults to find that there is a possibility of controverting whether any dictates come from a greater than mortal source; repugnance both to the *laws* of a

only, in the first place, to come into intimate acquaintance with a man, who had the art of alluding to a sacred subject in a manner which, without appearing like intentional contempt, divested it of its solemnity; and who had possessed himself of a few acute observations or plausible maxims, not explicitly hostile to revealed religion, but which, when opportunely brought into view in connexion with some points of it, tended to throw a slight degree of doubt on their truth and authority. Especially if either or both of these men had any decided moral tendencies and pursuits of a kind which christianity condemned, *the friend of intellectual and moral freedom* was assiduous to insinuate, that, according to the principles of reason and nature at least, it would be difficult to prove the wisdom or the necessity of some of those dictates of religion, which must however, he admitted, be revered because divine. Let the mind have once acquired a feeling as if the sacred system might in some points be invalidated, the involuntary inference would be rapidly extended to other parts, and to the whole. Nor was it long probably before this new instructor plainly avowed his own entire emancipation from a popular prejudice, to which he was kindly

severe and sublime morality, and to the feeling of accountableness to an intelligent, all-powerful Authority that will not leave moral laws to be enforced solely by their own sanctions; contempt of inferior men; the attraction of a few brilliant examples; the fashion of a class; the ambition of shewing what ability can do, and what courage can dare—if such things as these, after all, have excited and directed the efforts of a philosophic spirit, the unbelieving philosopher must be content to acknowledge plenty of companions and rivals among little men, who are quite as capable of being actuated by these elevated principles as himself.

sorry to find a *sensible* young man still in captivity. But he had no doubt that the deductions of enlightened reason would successfully appeal to every liberal mind. And accordingly, after perhaps a few months of frequent intercourse, with the addition of two or three books, and the obvious aid of all the recollected vices of pretended christians and pretended christian churches, the whole venerable magnificence of Revelation was annihilated. Its illuminations respecting the Divinity, its miracles, its Messiah, its authority of moral legislation, its regions of immortality and retribution, the sublime virtues and devotion of its prophets, apostles, and martyrs, together with the reasonings of so many accomplished advocates, and the credibility of history itself, were vanished all away; while the convert, exulting in his disenchantment, felt a strange pleasure to behold nothing but a dreary train of impostures and credulity stretching over those past ages which lately were gilded with so divine a vision, and the thickest Egyptian shades fallen on that total vast futurity which the spirit of inspiration had partially and very solemnly illuminated.

Nothing tempts the mind so powerfully on, as to have successfully begun to demolish what has been deemed to be most sacred. The soldiers of Cæsar probably had never felt themselves so brave, as after they had cut down the Massilian grove; nor the Philistines, as when the ark of the God of Israel was among their spoils: the mind is proud of its triumphs in proportion to the reputed greatness of what it has overcome. And many examples would seem to indicate that the

first proud triumphs over religious faith involve some fatality of advancing, however formidable the mass of arguments which may obstruct the progress, to further victories. But perhaps the intellectual difficulty of the progress might be less than a zealous believer would be apt to imagine. As the ideas which give the greatest distinctness to our conception of a Divine Being are imparted by revelation, and rest on its authority, the rejection of that revelation would in a great measure banish those ideas, and destroy that distinctness. We have but to advert to pure heathenism, to perceive what a faint conception of this Being could be formed by the strongest intellect in the absence of revelation; and after the *rejection* of it, the mind would naturally be carried very far back toward that darkness, so that some of the attributes of the Deity would immediately become, as they were with the heathens, subjects of doubtful conjecture and hopeless speculation. But from this state of thought it is perhaps no vast transition to that, in which his being also shall begin to appear a subject of doubt; since the reality of a being is with difficulty apprehended, in proportion as its attributes are undefinable. And when the mind is brought into doubt, we know it easily advances to disbelief, if to the smallest plausibility of arguments be added any powerful moral cause for wishing such a conclusion. In the present case, there *might* be a very powerful cause, besides that pride of victory which I have just noticed. The progress in guilt which generally follows a rejection of revelation, makes it still

more and more desirable that no object should remain to be feared. It was not strange therefore if this man read with avidity, or even strange if he read with something which his wishes completed into conviction, a few of the writers, who have attempted the last achievment of presumptuous man. After inspecting these pages awhile he raised his eyes, and the Great Spirit was gone. Mighty transformation of all things ! The luminaries of heaven no longer shone with his splendour; the adorned earth no longer looked fair with his beauty; the darkness of night had ceased to be rendered solemn by his majesty; life and thought were not an effect of his all-pervading energy; it was not his providence that supported an infinite charge of dependent beings; his empire of justice no longer spread over the universe; nor had even that universe sprung from his all-creating power. Yet when you saw the intellectual course brought to this signal conclusion, though aware of the force of each preceding and predisposing circumstance, you might nevertheless be somewhat struck with the suddenness of the final decision, and might be curious to know what kind of argument and eloquence could so quickly finish the work. You would examine those pages with the expectation probably of something more powerful than subtlety attenuated into inanity, and, in that invisible and impalpable state, mistaken by the writer, and willingly admitted by the perverted reader, for profundity of reasoning; than attempts to destroy the certainty, or preclude the application, of some of those great familiar principles which must be taken as the basis of human reasoning,

or it can have no basis; than suppositions which attribute the order of the universe to such causes as it would be felt ridiculous to pronounce adequate to produce the most trifling piece of mechanism; than mystical jargon which, under the name of *nature*, alternately exalts almost into the properties of a god, and reduces far below those of a man, some imaginary and undefinable agent or agency, which performs the most amazing works without power, and displays the most amazing wisdom without intelligence; than a zealous preference of that part of every great dilemma which merely confounds and sinks the mind, to that which elevates while it overwhelms it; than a constant endeavour to degrade as far as possible every thing that is sublime in our speculations and feelings; or than monstrous parallels between religion and mythology. You would be still more unprepared to expect on so solemn a subject the occasional wit, or affectation of wit, which would seem rather prematurely expressive of exultation that the grand Foe is retiring.

A feeling of complete certainty would hardly be thus rapidly attained; but a slight degree of remaining doubt, and of consequent apprehension, would not prevent this disciple of darkness from accepting the invitation to pledge himself to the cause in some associated band, where profaneness and vice would consolidate impious opinions without the aid of augmented conviction, and where the fraternity, having been elated by the spirit of social daring, to say, What is the Almighty that *we* should serve him? the individuals might acquire each a firmer boldness to ex-

claim, Who is the Lord that *I* should obey his voice? Thus easy it is, my friend, for a man to meet that train of influences which may seduce him to live an infidel, though it may betray him to die a terrified believer; that train of which the infatuation, while it promises him the impunity of non-existence and degrades him to desire it, impels him to fill up the measure of his iniquity, till the divine wrath come upon him to the uttermost.

LETTER VI.

In recounting so many influences that operate on man, it is grievous to observe that the incomparably noblest of all, religion, is counteracted with a fatal success by a perpetual conspiracy of almost all the rest, aided by the intrinsic predisposition of our nature, which yields itself with such consenting facility to every impression tending to estrange it still further from God.

It is a cause for wonder and sorrow, to see millions of rational creatures growing into their permanent habits, under the conforming efficacy of every thing which they ought to resist, and receiving no part of those habits from impressions of the Supreme Object. They are content that a narrow scene of a diminutive world, with its atoms and evils, should usurp and deprave and finish their education for immortality,

while the Infinite Spirit is here, whose transforming companionship would exalt them into his sons, and in defiance of a thousand malignant forces attempting to stamp on them an opposite image, lead them into eternity in his likeness. Oh why is it so possible that this greatest inhabitant of every place where men are living, should be the last whose society they seek, or of whose being constantly near them they feel the importance? Why is it possible to be surrounded with the intelligent Reality which exists wherever we are, with attributes that are infinite, and not feel respecting all other things which may be attempting to press on our minds and affect their character, as if they retained with difficulty their shadows of existence, and were continually on the point of vanishing into nothing? Why is this stupendous Intelligence so retired and silent, while present, over all the scenes of the earth, and in all the paths and abodes of men? Why does he keep his glory invisible behind the shades and visions of the material world? Why does not this latent glory sometimes beam forth with such a manifestation as could never be forgotten, nor ever be remembered without an emotion of religious fear? And why, in contempt of all that he *has* displayed to excite either fear or love, is it still possible for a rational creature so to live, that it must finally come to an interview with him in a character completed by the full assemblage of those acquisitions which have separately been disapproved by him through every stage of the accumulation? Why is it possible for feeble creatures to maintain their little dependent

beings fortified and invincible in sin, amidst the presence of divine purity? Why does not the thought of such a Being strike through the mind with such intense antipathy to evil as to blast with death every active principle that is beginning to pervert it, and render gradual additions of depravity, growing into the solidity of habit, as impossible as for perishable materials to be raised into structures amidst the fires of the last day? How is it possible to forget the solicitude which should accompany the consciousness that such a Being is continually darting upon us the beams of observant thought, (if we may apply such a term to omniscience,) that we are exposed to the piercing inspection, compared to which the concentrated attention of all the beings in the universe besides, would be but as the powerless gaze of an infant? Why is faith, that faculty of spiritual apprehension, so absent, or so incomparably more slow and reluctant to receive a just perception of the grandest of its objects, than the senses are adapted to receive the impressions of theirs? While there is a Spirit pervading the universe with an infinite energy of being, why have the few particles of dust which enclose *our* spirits the power to intercept all sensible communication with it, and to place them as in a vacuity where the sacred Essence had been precluded or extinguished?

The reverential submission, with which you ought to contemplate the mystery of omnipotent benevolence forbearing to exert the agency which could assume an instantaneous ascendency in every mind over the causes of depravation and

ruin, will not avert your compassion from the unhappy persons who are practically "without God in the world." And if, by some vast enlargement of thought, you could comprehend the whole measure and depth of disaster contained in this exclusion, (an exclusion under which, to the view of a serious mind, the resources and magnificence of the creation would sink into a mass of dust and ashes, and all the causes of joy and hope into disgust and despair,) you would feel a distressing emotion at each recital of a life in which religion had no share; and you would be tempted to wish that some spirit from the other world, possessed of eloquence that might threaten to alarm the slumbers of the dead, would throw himself in the way of this one mortal, and this one more, to protest, in sentences of lightning and thunder, against the infatuation that can at once acknowledge there is a God, and be content to forego every connexion with him, but that of danger. You would wish they should rather be assailed by the "terror of the Lord," than retain the satisfaction of carelessness till the day of his mercy be past.

But you will not need such enlargement of comprehension, in order to compassionate the situation of persons who, with reason sound to think, and hearts not strangers to feeling, have advanced far into life, perhaps near to its close, without having felt the influence of religion. If there is such a Being as we mean by the term God, the ordinary intelligence of a serious mind will be quite enough to see that it must be a melancholy thing to pass through life, and quit it,

just as if there were not. And sometimes it will appear as strange as it is melancholy; especially to a person who has been pious from his youth. He would be inclined to say, to a person who has nearly finished an irreligious life, What would have been justly thought of you, if you could have been the greatest part of your time in the society of the wisest and best man on earth, (were it possible to have ascertained that individual,) and have acquired no degree of conformity; much more, if you could all the while have acquired progressively the meanness, prejudices, follies, and vices, of the lowest society with which you might have been exposed at intervals to mingle? You might have been asked how *this* was possible. But then through what defect or infatuation of mind have you been able, during so many years spent in the presence of a GOD, to continue even to this hour as clear of all marks and traces of any divine influences having operated on you, as if the Deity were but a poetical fiction, or an idol in some temple of Asia? Obviously, as the immediate cause, through want of thought concerning him.

And why did you not think of him? Did a most solemn thought of him never *once* penetrate your soul, while admitting the proposition that there is such a Being? If it never did, what is reason, what is mind, what is man? If it did once, how could its effects stop there? How could a deep thought, on so singular and momentous a subject, fail to impose on the mind a permanent necessity of frequently recalling it; as some awful or magnificent spectacle will haunt

you with a long recurrence of its image, even if the spectacle itself were seen no more?

Why did you not think of him? How could you estimate so meanly your mind with all its capacities, as to feel no regret that an endless series of trifles should seize, and occupy as their right, all your thoughts, and deny them both the liberty and the ambition of going on to the greatest Object? How, while called to the contemplations which absorb the spirits of heaven, could you be so patient of the task of counting the flies of a summer's day?

Why did you not think of him? You knew yourself to be in the hands of some Being from whose power you could not be withdrawn; was it not an equal defect of curiosity and prudence, to indulge a careless confidence that sought no acquantance with his nature and his dispositions, nor ever anxiously inquired what conduct should be observed toward him, and what expectations might be entertained from him? You would have been alarmed to have felt yourself in the power of a mysterious stranger of your own feeble species; but let the stranger be omnipotent, and you cared no more.

Why did you not think of him? One would deem that the thought of him must, to a serious mind, come second to almost every thought. The thought of virtue would suggest the thought of both a lawgiver and a rewarder; the thought of crime, of an avenger; the thought of sorrow, of a consoler; the thought of an inscrutable mystery, of an intelligence that understands it; the thought of that ever-moving ac-

tivity which prevails in the system of the universe, of a supreme agent; the thought of the human family, of a great father; the thought of all being, of a creator; the thought of life, of a preserver; and the thought of death, of a solemn and uncontrollable disposer. By what dexterity therefore of irreligious caution, did you avoid precisely every track where the idea of him would have met you, or elude that idea if it came? And what must sound reason pronounce of a mind which in the train of millions of thoughts, has wandered to all things under the sun, to all the permanent objects or vanishing appearances in the creation, but never fixed its thought on the Supreme Reality; never approached, like Moses, "to see this great sight?"

If it were a thing which we might be allowed to imagine, that the Divine Being were to manifest himself in some striking manner to the senses, as by some resplendent appearance at the midnight hour, or by re-kindling on an elevated mountain the long-extinguished fires of Sinai, and uttering voices from those fires; would he not compel from you an attention which you now refuse? Yes, you will say, he would then seize the mind with irresistible force, and religion would become its most absolute sentiment; but he only presents himself to faith. Well, and is it a worthy reason for disregarding him, that you *only believe* him to be present and infinitely glorious? Is it the office of faith to veil or annihilate its object? Cannot you reflect that the grandest representation of a spiritual and divine Being to the senses would bear not only no proportion to

you with a long re[illegible] his nature, and could the spectacle [illegible] inferior dispensation of re-

Why [illegible] who, with the exception you est[illegible] small number of men, had capac[illegible] untaught to carry their thoughts be-ries [illegible] objects of sense? Are you not aware rig[illegible] that such a representation would considerably li[illegible] tend to restrict you in your contemplation to a defined image, and therefore a most inadequate and subordinate idea of the divine Being? While the idea admitted by faith, though less immediately striking, is capable of an illimitable expansion, by the addition of all that progressive thought can accumulate, under the continual certainty that all is still infinitely short of the reality.

On the whole, you would say, I regard you as an object of great compassion; unless there can be no felicity in friendship with the Almighty, unless there be no glory in being assimilated to his excellence, unless there be no eternal rewards for his devoted servants, unless there be no danger in meeting him, at length, after a life estranged equally from his love and his fear. I deplore, at every period and crisis in the review of your life, that religion was not there. If religion had been there, your youthful animation would neither have been dissipated in the frivolity which, in the morning of the short day of life, fairly and formally sets aside all serious business for *that* day, nor would have sprung forward into the emulation of vice, or the bravery of profaneness. If religion had been there, that one despicable companion, and that other malignant one, would

not have seduced you into their society, or would not have retained you to participate their degradation. And if religion had accompanied the subsequent progress of your life, it would have elevated you to rank, at this hour, with those saints who will soon be added to "the spirits of the just." Instead of which, what are you now, and what are your expectations from that world, where piety alone can hope to find such a sequel of life, as will inspire exultation in the retrospect of this introductory period, in which the mind began to converse with the God of eternity?

On the other hand, it would be interesting to record, or to hear, the history of a character which has received its form, and reached its maturity, under the strongest operations of religion. We do not know that there is a more beneficent or a more direct mode of the divine agency in any part of the creation than that which "apprehends" a man, as apostolic language expresses it, amidst the unthinking crowd, and leads him into serious reflection, into elevated devotion, into progressive virtue, and finally into a nobler life after death. When he has long been commanded by this influence, he will be happy to look back to its first operations, whether they were mingled in early life almost insensibly with his feelings, or came on him with mighty force at some particular time, and in connexion with some assignable and memorable circumstance, which was apparently the instrumental cause. He will trace all the progress of this his better life, with grateful acknowledgment to the sacred power which has advanced him to a de-

cisiveness of religious habit that seems to stamp eternity on his character. In the great majority of things, habit is a greater plague than ever afflicted Egypt; in religious character, it is a grand felicity. The devout man exults in the indications of his being fixed and irretrievable. He feels this confirmed habit as the grasp of the hand of God, which will never let him go. From this advanced state he looks with firmness and joy on futurity, and says, I carry the eternal mark upon me that I belong to God; I am free of the universe; and I am ready to go to any world to which he shall please to transmit me, certain that every where, in height or depth, he will acknowledge me for ever.

LETTER VII.

THE preceding letters have attempted to exhibit only general views of the influences by which a reflective man may perceive the moral condition of his mind to have been determined.

In descending into more particular illustrations, there would have been no end of enumerating the local circumstances, the relationships of life, the professions and employments, and the accidental events, which may have affected the character. A person who feels any interest in reviewing what has formed thus far his education for futurity, may carry his own examination

into the most distinct particularity.——A few miscellaneous observations will conclude the essay.

You will have observed that I have said comparatively little of that which forms the exterior, and in general account, the main substance of the history of a man's life—the train of his fortunes and actions. If an adventurer or a soldier writes memoirs of himself for the information or amusement of the public, he may do well to keep his narrative alive by a constant crowded course of facts; for the greater part of readers will excuse him the trouble of investigating, and he might occasionally feel it a convenience to be excused from disclosing, if he had investigated, the history and merits of his internal principles. Nor can this ingenuousness be any part of his duty, any more than it is that of a fiddler at a ball, so long as he tells all that probably he professes to tell, that is, where he has been, what he has witnessed, and what he has done. Let him go on with his lively anecdotes, or his legends of the marvellous, or his gazettes of marches, stratagems, and skirmishes, and there is no obligation for him to turn either penitent or philosopher on our hands. But I am supposing a man to retrace himself through his past life, in order to acquire a complete knowledge of himself, and to record the investigation for his own instruction. Through such a retrospect, the exterior life will hold the second place in attention, as being the imperfect offspring of that internal state, which it is the primary and more difficult object to review. He will edeavour to trace himself out-

ward, from his mind into his actions. No doubt indeed he will sometimes also trace himself inward, from his actions to his principles; and, in taking a comprehensive view of those actions, he will feel himself in possession of an important though defective explication of his interior character. Still it is that interior character, whether displayed in actions or not, which forms the leading object of inquiry. The chief circumstances of his practical life must however be mentioned, both because they are the indications of the state of his mind, and because they mark the points, and distinguish the stages of his progress.

Though in memoirs intended for publication, a large share of incident and action would generally be necessary, yet there are some men whose mental history alone might be very interesting to reflective readers; as for instance that of a thinking man, remarkable for a number of complete changes of his speculative system. From observing the usual tenacity of views once deliberately adopted in mature life, we regard as a curious phænomenon, the man whose mind has been a kind of caravansera of opinions, entertained awhile, and then sent on pilgrimage; a man who has admired and dismissed systems with the same facility which John Buncle found, adored, married, and interred his succession of wives, each one being, for the time, not only better than all that went before, but the best in the creation. You admire the versatile aptitude of a mind, sliding into successive forms of belief in this intellectual metempsychosis by which it animates so many new bodies of doctrines in their turn. And as

none of those dying pangs which hurt you in a tale of India, attend the desertion of each of these speculative forms which the soul has awhile inhabited, you are extremely amused by the number of transitions, and eagerly ask what is to be the next, for you never deem the present state of such a man's views to be for permanence, unless perhaps when he has terminated his course of believing every thing, in ultimately believing nothing. Even then, unless he is very old, or feels more pride in being a sceptic, the conqueror of all systems, than he ever felt in being the champion of one, even then, it is very possible he may spring up again, like a vapour of fire from a bog, and glimmer through new mazes, or retrace his course through half of those which he trod before. You will observe, that no respect attaches to this Proteus of opinion, after his changes have been multiplied; as no party expect him to remain with them, nor deem him much of an acquisition if he should. One, or perhaps two, considerable changes will be regarded as signs of a liberal inquirer, and therefore the party to which his first or his second intellectual conversion may assign him, will receive him gladly. But he will be deemed to have abdicated the dignity of reason, when it is found that he can adopt no principles but to betray them; and it will be perhaps justly suspected that there is something extremely infirm in the structure of that mind, whatever vigour may mark some of its operations, to which a series of very different, and sometimes contrasted theories, can appear in succession demonstratively

true, and which imitates sincerely the perverseness which Petruchio only affected, declaring that which was yesterday, to a certainty, the sun, to be to-day, as certainly, the moon.

It would be curious to observe in a man who should make such an exhibition of the course of his mind, the sly deceit of self-love. While he despises the system which he has rejected, he does not deem it to imply so great a want of sense in *him* once to have embraced it, as in the rest, who were then or are now its disciples and advocates. No, in *him* it was no debility of reason, it was at the utmost but a merge of it; and probably he is prepared to explain to you that such peculiar circumstances, as might warp even a very strong and liberal mind, attended his consideration of the subject, and misled him to admit the belief of what others prove themselves fools by believing.

Another thing apparent in a record of changed opinions would be, what I have noticed before, that there is scarcely any such thing in the world as simple conviction. It would be amusing to observe how reason had, in one instance, been over-ruled into acquiescence by the admiration of a celebrated name, or, in another, into opposition by the envy of it; how most opportunely reason discovered the truth just at the time that interest could be essentially served by avowing it; how easily the impartial examiner could be induced to adopt some part of another man's opinions, after that other had zealously approved some favourite, especially if unpopular part of his, as the Pharisees almost became partial even to

Christ, at the moment that he defended one of their doctrines against the Sadducees. It would be curious to see how a professed respect for a man's character and talents, and concern for his interests, might be changed, in consequence of some personal inattention experienced from him, into illiberal invective against him or his intellectual performances, and yet the railer, though actuated solely by petty revenge, account himself the model of equity and candour all the while. It might be seen how the patronage of power could elevate miserable prejudices into revered wisdom, while poor old Experience was mocked with thanks for her instruction; and how the vicinity or society of the rich, and, as they are termed, great, could perhaps melt a soul that seemed to be of the stern consistence of early Rome, into the gentlest wax into which Corruption could wish to imprint the venerable creed, "The right divine of kings to govern wrong," with the pious inference that justice was outraged when virtuous Tarquin was expelled. I am supposing the *observer* to perceive all these accommodating dexterities of reason; for it were probably absurd to expect that any mind should itself be able, in its review, to detect all its own obliquities, after having been so long beguiled, like the mariners in a story which I remember to have read, who followed the direction of their compass, infallibly right as they thought, till they arrived at an enemy's port, where they were seized and doomed to slavery. It happened that the wicked captain, in order to betray the ship, had concealed a large loadstone at a little distance on one side of the needle.

On the notions and expectations of one stage of life, I suppose all reflecting men look back with a kind of contempt, though it may be often with the mingling wish that some of its enthusiasm of feeling could be recovered,—I mean the period between proper childhood and maturity. They will allow that their reason was *then* feeble, and they are prompted to exclaim, What fools we have been—while they recollect how sincerely they entertained and advanced the most ridiculous speculations on the interests of life, and the questions of truth; how regretfully astonished they were to find the mature sense of some of those around them so completely wrong; yet in other instances what veneration they felt for authorities for which they have since lost all their respect; what a fantastic importance they attached to some most trivial things*; what complaints against their fate were uttered on account of disappointments which they have since recollected with gaiety or self-congratulation; what happiness of Elysium they expected from sources which would soon have failed to impart even common satisfaction; and how certain they were that the feelings and opinions then predominant would continue through life.

If a reflective aged man were to find at the bottom of an old chest, where it had lain forgotten fifty years, a record which he had written of himself when he was young, simply and vividly describing his whole heart and pursuits, and re-

* I recollect a youth of some acquirements, who earnestly wished the time might one day arrive, when his name should be adorned with the addition of D. D. which he deemed one of the sublimest of human distinctions.

citing verbatim many passages of the language which he sincerely uttered; would he not read it with more wonder than almost every other writing could, at his age, inspire? He would half lose the assurance of his identity, under the impression of this immense dissimilarity. It would seem as if it must be the tale of the juvenile days of some ancestor, with whom he had no connexion but that of name. He would feel the young man, thus introduced to him, separated by so wide a distance of character, as to render all congenial sociality impossible. At every sentence he would be tempted to repeat, Foolish youth! I have no sympathy with your feelings, I can hold no converse with your understanding. Thus you see that in the course of a long life a man may be several moral persons, so various from one another, that if you could find a real individual that should nearly exemplify the character, in one of these stages, and another that should exemplify it, in the next, and so on to the last, and then bring these several persons together into one society, which would thus be a representation of the successive states of one man, they would feel themselves a most heterogenous party, would oppose and probably despise one another, and soon after separate, not caring if they were never to meet again. If the dissimilarity in mind were as great as in person, there would in both respects be a most striking contrast between the extremes at least, between the youth of seventeen and the sage of seventy. The one of these contrasts an old man might contemplate, if he had a true portrait for which

he sat in the bloom of his life, and should hold it beside a mirror in which he looks at his present countenance; and the other would be powerfully felt, if he had such a genuine and detailed memoir as I have supposed*. Might it not be worth while for a self-observant person in early life, to preserve, for the inspection of the old man if he should live long, such a mental likeness of the young one? If it be not drawn near the time, it can never be drawn with sufficient accuracy.

If this sketch of life were not written till a very mature or advanced period of it, a somewhat interesting point would be, to distinguish the periods during which the mind made its greatest progress in the enlargement of its faculties, and the time when they appear to have reached and acknowledged their insuperable limits. And if there have been vernal seasons, if I may express it, of goodness, periods separated off from the later course of life by some point of time, subsequent to which the christian virtues have had a less generous growth, this is a circumstance still more worthy to be strongly marked. No doubt it will be with a reluctant hand that he marks either of these circumstances; for a man could not reflect without regret that many children may have grown into maturity and great talent, and many unformed or defective characters into established excellence, since the period when he ceased to become abler or better. Pope, for instance,

* Since a character, and a set of opinions, once formed, not unfrequently continue *substantially* through life, perhaps the moral and intellectual difference between the stages, is not quite as great as the physical. Some people have in fact but three or four stages in the whole of life.

at the age of fifty, would have been incomparably more mortified than Dr. Johnson says his readers are, at the fact, if he had perceived it, that he could not write better than he had at the age of twenty.—And the consciousness of having passed many years without any moral and religious progress, ought to be not merely the regret for an infelicity, but the remorse of guilt; since though natural causes must some where have circumscribed and fixed the extent of the intellectual power, an incessant advancement in the nobler distinctions has still continued to be possible, and will be possible till the evening of rational life. The instruction resulting from a clear estimate of what has been effected or not in this capital concern, is the chief advantage to be derived from recording the stages of life, comparing one part with another, and bringing the whole into a comparison with the standard of perfection, and the illustrious human examples which have approached that standard the nearest. In forming this estimate, we shall keep in view the vast series of advantages and monitions, which has run parallel to the train of years; and it will be inevitable to recollect, sometimes with mortification bordering on anguish, the sanguine calculations of improvement of the best kind, which at various periods the mind was delighted to make for other given future periods, should life be protracted till then, and promised itself most certainly to realize by the time of their arrival. Perhaps there might be even something more hopeful, at some past seasons, than these mere confident presumptions; there might be actual favourable

omens, which raised and partly justified in ourselves and others, anticipations that have mournfully failed. My dear friend, it is very melancholy that EVIL must be so palpable, so hatefully conspicious, to an enlightened conscience, in every retrospect of a human life.

If the supposed memoirs are to be carried forward as life advances, each period being recorded as soon as it has elapsed, they should not be composed by small daily or weekly accumulations, (though this practice may on another ground have its value,) but at certain considerable intervals, as at the end of each year, or any other measure of time that is ample enough for some definable alteration to have taken place in the character or attainments.

It is needless to say that the *style* should be as simple as possible—unless indeed the writer accounts the *theme* worthy of being bedecked with brilliants and flowers. If he idolizes his own image so much as to think it deserves to be enshrined in a frame of gold, why, let him enshrine it.

Should it be asked what degree of explicitness ought to prevail through this review, in reference to those particulars on which conscience has fixed the deepest mark of condemnation. I answer, that if a man writes it exclusively for his own use, he ought to signify both the nature of the delinquency and the measure of it, so far at least as to secure to his mind a most defined recollection of the facts, and of the verdict pronounced by conscience before its emotions were quelled by time. Such honest distinctness is necessary, because this will be the most useful part of his record for

reflection to dwell upon—because this is the part which self-love is most willing to diminish and memory to dismiss—because he may be certain that mere general terms or allusions of censure will but little aid the cultivation of his humility—and because this license of saying so much about himself in the character of a biographer may become only a temptation to the indulgence of vanity, and a protection from the shame of it, unless he is made to feel that he is narrating at a severe confessional.

But perhaps he wishes to hold this record open to an intimate relative or friend; perhaps even thinks it might supply some interest and some lessons to his children. And what then? Why then it is perhaps too probable that though he could readily confess some of his faults, there may have been certain states of his mind, and certain circumstances in his conduct, which he cannot easily persuade himself to present to such inspection. Such a difficulty of being quite ingenuous is in every instance a cause for deep regret. Should not a man tremble to feel himself involved in a difficulty of confiding to an equal and a mortal, what has been all observed by the Supreme Witness and Judge? And the consideration of the large proportion of men constituting such instances, throws a melancholy hue over the general human character. It has several times in writing this essay occurred to me what strangers men may be to one another, whether as to the influences which have determined their characters, or as to the less obvious parts of their conduct. What strangers too we may be,

with persons who have any power and caution of concealment, to the principles which are at this moment prevaling in the heart. Each mind has an interior apartment of its own, into which none but itself and the Divinity can enter. In this retired place, the passions mingle and fluctuate in unknown agitations. Here all the fantastic and all the tragic shapes of imagination have a haunt where they can neither be invaded nor descried. Here the surrounding human beings, while quite unconscious of it, are made the subjects of deliberate thought, and many of the designs respecting them revolved in silence.—Here projects, conviction, vows, are confusedly scattered, and the records of past life are laid. Here in solitary state sits Conscience, surrounded by her own thunders, which sometimes sleep, and sometimes roar, while the world does not know. The secrets of this apartment, could they have been fully brought forth, might have been fatal to that eulogy and splendour with which many a piece of biography has been exhibited by a partial and ignorant friend. If, in a man's own account of himself, written on the supposition of being seen by any other person, the substance of the secrets of this apartment is brought forth, he throws open the last asylum of his character, where it is well if there be nothing found that will distress and irritate his most intimate friend, who may thus become the ally of his conscience to condemn, without the leniency which even conscience acquires from self-love. And if it is not brought forth, where is the integrity or value of the history; and what ingenuous man

could bear to give a delusive assurance of his being, or having been, so much more worthy of applause or affection than conscience all the while pronounces? It is obvious then that a man whose sentiments and designs, or the undisclosed parts of whose conduct, have been stained with deep delinquency, must keep his record most sacred to himself, unless he feels such an unsupportable longing to relieve his heart by confiding its painful consciousness, that he can be content to hold the regard of his friend on the strength of his penitence and recovered virtue. As to the rest, whose memory of the past is sullied by shades if not by stains, they must either in the same manner retain this delineation for solitary use, or limit themselves, in writing it, to a deliberate and strong expression of the *measure* of conscious culpabilities, and their effect in the general character, with a certain reserve and indefiniteness of explanation that shall equally avoid particularity and mystery; or else, they must consent to meet their friends, who are likewise human and have had their errors, on terms of mutual ingenuous acknowledgment. In this confidential communication, each will learn to behold the other's deviations fully as much in that light in which they certainly are infelicities to be commiserated, as in that in which they are also faults or vices to be condemned; while both will earnestly endeavour to improve by their remembered improprieties. The apostle seems to encourage such a confidence, where he says, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another."

But I shall find myself in danger of becoming ridiculous amidst these scruples about an entire ingenuousness to a confidential friend or two, while I glance into the literary world, and observe the number of historians of their own lives, who magnanimously throw the complete cargo, both of their vanities and their vices, before the whole public. Men who can gaily laugh at themselves for ever having even pretended to goodness; men who can tell of having sought consolation for the sorrows of bereaved tenderness, in the recesses of debauchery; men whose language betrays that they deem a spirited course of profligate adventures a much nobler thing than the stupidity of vulgar virtues, and who seem to claim the sentiments with which we regard an unfortunate hero, for the disasters into which these adventures led them; venal partisans whose talents would hardly have been bought, if their venom had not made up the deficiency; profane travelling coxcombs; players and the makers of immoral plays—all these can narrate the course of a contaminated life with the most ingenuous effrontery. Even courtezans, grieved at the excess of modesty by which the age is afflicted, have endeavoured to diminish the evil, by presenting themselves before the public, in their narratives, in a manner very analogous to that in which the Lady Godiva is said to have consented, from a most generous inducement, to pass through the city of Coventry. They can gravely relate, perhaps with intermingled paragraphs and verses of plaintive sensibility, (a kind of weeds in which sentiment without principle apes and mocks mourning virtue,) the whole

nauseous detail of their transitions from proprietor to proprietor. They can tell of the precautions for meeting some person of distinction, in a manner that should not subject him to the reputation of such a meeting; the hour when they crossed the river in a boat; the arrangements about money; the kindness of the gentleman at one time, his contemptuous neglect at another; and every thing else that can turn the compassion with which we deplore their first misfortunes and errors, into detestation of the effrontery which cannot be content without proclaiming the commencement, sequel, and all, to the world.

With regard to all the classes of self-describers who thus think the publication of their vices necessary to crown their fame, one should wish there were some public mark and brand of emphatical reprobation, to reward this tribute to public morals. Men that court the pillory for the plesaure of it, ought to receive the honour of it too, in all those contumelious salutations which suit the merits of vice grown proud of its impudence. Those that "glory in their shame" should, like other distinguished personages, "pay a tax for being eminent." Yet I own the public itself is to be consulted in this case; for if the public welcomes such productions, it shews there are readers who feel themselves a-kin to the writers, and it would be hard to deprive congenial souls of the luxury of their appropriate sympathies. If such is the taste, it proves that a considerable portion of the public deserves just that kind of respect for its virtue, which is very

significantly implied in this confidence of its favour.

One is indignant at the cant pretence and title of Confessions, sometimes adopted by these narrators of their own disgrace, as if it were to be believed that penitence and humility would ever incite men to call thousands to witness an unnecessary disclosure of what oppresses them with grief and shame. If they would be severely mortified that only a few readers should think it worth their while to see them thus performing the work of self-degradation, like the fetid heroes of the Dunciad in a ditch, is it because they would gladly incur the contempt and disgust of multitudes in order to serve the cause of virtue? No, this title of Confessions is only a nominal deference to morality, necessary indeed to be paid, because mankind never forget to insist, that the *name* of virtue shall be devoutly respected, even while vice obtains from them that practical favour on which these writers place their reliance for toleration or applause. This slight homage being duly rendered, and occasionally repeated, they trust in the character of the community, that they shall not meet the kind of condemnation, and they have no desire for the kind of pity, which would strictly belong to criminals; nor is it any part of their penitence, to wish that society may become better by the odious repellency of their example. They are glad the age continues such, that even *they* may have claims to be praised; and honour of some kind, and from some quarter, is the object to which they aspire, and the consequence which they promise

themselves. Let them once be convinced, that they make such exhibitions under the absolute condition of subjecting themselves irredeemably to opprobrium, as in Miletus, the persons infected with a rage for destroying themselves, were by a solemn decree assured of being exposed, after the perpetration of the deed, in naked ignomy—and these literary suicides will be heard of no more.

Rousseau has given a memorable example of this voluntary humiliation, and has very honestly assigned the degree of contrition which accompanied the self-inflicted penance, in the declaration, that this document, with all its dishonours, shall be presented in his justification before the Eternal Judge. If we could, in any case, pardon the kind of ingenuousness which he has displayed, it would certainly be in the disclosure of a mind so amazingly singular as his*. We are willing to have such a being preserved, even to all the unsightly minutiæ and anomalies of its form, to be placed, as an unique, in the moral museum of the world†.

* There is indeed one case in which this kind of honesty would be so signally useful to mankind, that it would deserve almost to be canonized into a virtue. If statesmen, including ministers, popular leaders, ambassadors, &c. would publish, before they go in the triumph of virtue to the "last audit," or leave to be published after they are gone, each a frank exposition of motives, cabals, and manœuvres, it would give dignity to that blind adoration of power and rank in which mankind have always *superstitiously* lived, by supplying just reasons for that adoration. It would also give a new aspect to history; and perhaps might tend to a happy exorcism of that evil spirit which has never allowed nations to remain at peace.

† It is very needless to express the admiration, which it is impossible not to feel, of Rousseau's transcendent genius.

Rousseau's impious reference to the Divine Judge, leads me to suggest, as I conclude, the consideration, that the history of each man's life, though it should not be written by himself or by any mortal hand, is thus far unerringly recorded, will one day be finished in truth, and one other day yet to come, will be brought to a final estimate. A mind accustomed to grave reflections is sometimes led involuntarily into a curiosity of awful conjecture, which asks, What are those very words which I should read this night, if, as to Belshazzar, a hand of prophetic shade were sent to write before me the identical sentences in which that final estimate will be declared?—

ESSAY II.

On Decision of Character.

LETTER I.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

We have several times talked of this bold quality, and acknowledged its great importance. Without it, a human being, with powers at best but feeble, and surrounded by innumerable things tending to perplex, to divert, or to oppress, their operations, is indeed a pitiable atom, the sport of divers and casual impulses. It is a poor and disgraceful thing, not to be able to reply, with some degree of certainty, to the simple questions, What will you be? What will you do?

A little acquaintance with mankind will supply numberless illustrations of the importance of this character. You will often see a person anxiously hesitating a long time between different, or opposite determinations, though impatient of the pain of such a state, and ashamed of its debility. A faint impulse of preference alternates toward the one, and toward the other; and the mind, while thus held in a trembling balance, is vexed that it cannot get some new thought, or feeling,

or motive, that it has not more sense, more resolution, more of any thing that would save it from envying even the decisive instinct of brutes. It wishes that any circumstance might happen, or any person might appear, that could deliver it from the miserable suspense.

In many instances, when a determination is adopted, it is frustrated by this indecision. A man, for example, resolves to make a journey to-morrow, which he is not under an absolute necessity to make, but the inducements appear, this evening, so strong, that he does not think it possible he can hesitate in the morning. In the morning however, these inducements have unaccountably lost much of their force. Like the sun that is rising at the same time, they appear dim through a mist; and the sky lowers, or he fancies that it lowers; the fatigue appears formidable; and he lingers, uncertain till an advanced hour determine the question for him, by the certainty that it is now too late to go.

Perhaps a man has conclusive reasons for wishing to remove to another place of residence. But when he is going to take the first actual step towards executing his purpose, he is met by a new train of ideas, presenting the possible, and magnifying the unquestionable, disadvantages and uncertainties of a new situation; awakening the natural reluctance to quit a place to which habit has accommodated his feelings, and which has grown *warm* to him, if I may so express it, by his having been in it so long; giving new strength to his affection for the friends whom he must leave, and so detaining him still

lingering, long after his serious judgment has dictated to him to be gone.

A man may think of some desirable alteration in his plan of life; perhaps in the arrangements of his family, or in the mode of his intercouse with society.—Would it be a good thing? He thinks it would be a good thing. It certainly would be a very good thing. He wishes it were done. He will attempt it *almost* immediately. The following day, he doubts whether it would be quite prudent. Many things are to be considered. May there not be in the change some evil of which he is not aware? Is this a proper time? What will people say?—And thus, though he does not formally renounce his purpose, he recedes from it, with a wish that he could be fully satisfied of the propriety of renouncing it. Perhaps he wishes that the thought had never occurred to him, since it has diminished his self-complacency, without promoting his virtue. But the next day, his conviction of the wisdom and advantage of such a reform comes again with great force. Then, Is it so practicable as I was at first willing to imagine? Why not? Other men have done much greater things; a resolute mind is omnipotent; difficulty is a stimulus and a triumph to a strong spirit; "the joys of conquest are the joys of man." What need I care about people's opinion? It shall be done.—He makes the first attempt. But some unexpected obstacle presents itself; he feels the awkwardness of attempting an unaccustomed manner of acting; the questions or the ridicule of his friends disconcert him; his ardour abates and expires.

He again begins to question, whether it be wise, whether it be necessary, whether it be possible; and at last, surrenders his purpose, to be perhaps resumed when the same feelings return, and to be in the same manner again relinquished.

While animated by some magnanimous sentiments which he has heard or read, or while musing on some great example, a man may conceive the design, and partly sketch the plan, of a generous enterprise; and his imagination revels in the felicity that would follow to others and to himself from its accomplishment. It is an essential part of the design that *he* shall accomplish it.

Yet a certain consciousness in his mind doubtfully asks, Is this any thing more than a dream; or am I really destined to achieve such an enterprise? Destined! and why are not this conviction of its excellence, this conscious duty of performing the noblest things that are possible, and this passionate ardour, enough to secure that I shall effect it?—He feels indignant at that failing part of his nature which puts him so far below his own conceptions, and below the examples which he is admiring; and this feeling assists him to resolve, that he will undertake this enterprise, that he certainly will, though the Alps of the Ocean lie between him and the object.—Again his ardour slackens; distrustful of himself, he wishes to know how the design would appear to other minds; and when he speaks of it to his associates, one of them wonders, another laughs, and another frowns. His pride attempts, while with them, a manful defence; but his mind is gradually descending toward their level, he be-

comes ashamed to entertain a visionary project, which therefore, like a rejected friend, desists from intruding on him or following him, and he subsides, at last, into what he labours to believe a man too rational for the schemes of ill-calculating enthusiasm. It were strange if the effort to make out this favourable estimate of himself did not succeed, while it is so much more pleasant to attribute one's defect of enterprise to wisdom, which on maturer thought disapproves of it, than to imbecility, which shrinks from it.

A person of undecisive character wonders how all the embarrassments in the world happened to meet exactly in *his* way, to place him just in that one situation for which he is peculiarly unadapted, and in which he is also willing to think no other man could have acted with facility or confidence. Incapable of setting up a firm purpose on the basis of things as they are, he is often employed in vain speculations on some different supposable state of things, which would have saved him from all this perplexity and irresolution. He thinks what a determined course he could have pursued, *if* his talents, his health, his age, had been different; if he had been acquainted with some one person sooner; if his friends were, in this or the other point, different from what they are; or if fortune had showered her favors on him. And he gives himself as much license to complain, as if a right to all these advantages had been conferred on him at his nativity, but refused, by a malignant or capricious fate, to his life. Thus he is occupied—instead of catching with a vigilant eye, and sei-

zing with a strong hand, all the possibilities of his actual situation.

A man without decision can never be said to belong to himself; since, if he dared to assert that he did, the puny force of some cause, about as powerful, you would have supposed, as a spider, may capture the hapless boaster the very next moment, and triumphantly shew the futility of the determinations by which he was to have proved the independence of his understanding and his will. He belongs to whatever can seize him; and innumerable things do actually verify their claim on him, and arrest him as he tries to go along; as twigs and chips, floating near the edge of a river, are intercepted by every weed, and whirled in every little eddy. Having concluded on a design, he may pledge himself to accomplish it, *if* the five hundred diversities of feeling which may come within the week, will let him. As his character precludes all foresight of his conduct, he may sit and wonder what form and direction his views and actions are destined to take to-morrow; as a farmer waits the uncertain changes of the clouds to decide what he shall do.

This man's opinions and determinations always depend very much on other human beings; and what chance for consistency and stability, while the persons with whom he may converse, or transact, are so various? This very evening, he may talk with a man whose sentiments will melt away the present form and outline of his purposes, however firm and defined he may have fancied them to be. A succession of persons whose

faculties were stronger than his own, might, in spite of his irresolute re-action, take him and dispose of him as they pleased. An infirm character practically confesses itself made for subjection, and passes, like a slave, from owner to owner. Sometimes indeed it happens, that a man of this sort falls into the train, and under the permanent ascendency, of some one stronger character, which thus becomes through life the oracle and guide, and gives the inferior a steady will and plan.—This, when the leading character is virtuous, is a fortunate relief to the feeling, and an advantageous point gained to the utility, of the subordinate appended mind.

It is inevitable that the regulation of every man's plan must greatly depend on the course of events, which come in an order not to be foreseen or prevented. But even in accommodating the plans of conduct to the train of events, the difference between two men may be no less than that in the one instance the man is subservient to the events, and in the other the events are made subservient to the man. Some men seem to have been taken along by a succession of events, and, as it were, handed forward in quiet passiveness from one to another, without any determined principle in their own characters, by which they could constrain those events to serve a design formed antecedently to them, or apparently in defiance of them. The events seized them as a neutral material, not they the events.—Others, advancing through life with an internal invincible determination of mind, have seemed to make the train of circumstances, what-

ever they were, conduce as much to their chief design as if they had taken place on purpose. It is wonderful, how even the apparent casualties of life seem to bow to a spirit that will not bow to them, and yield to assist a design, after having in vain attempted to frustrate it.

You may have seen such examples, though they are comparatively not numerous. You may have seen a man of this strong character in a state of indecision concerning some affair in which it was requisite for him to determine, because it was requisite for him to act. But, in this case, his manner would assure you that he would not remain long undecided; you would wonder if you found him still at a loss the next day. If he explained his thoughts, you would perceive that their clear process, evidently at each effort, approaching nearer to the result, must certainly reach it ere long. The deliberation of such a mind is a very different thing from the fluctuation of the other. To *know how* to obtain a determination, is one of the first symptoms of a rationally decisive character.

When the decision was formed, and the purpose fixed, you would feel an entire assurance that something would absolutely be done. It is characteristic of such a mind, to think for effect; and the pleasure of escaping from temporary doubt gives an additional impulse to the force with which it is carried into action. Such a man will not re-examine his conclusions with endless repetition, and he will not be delayed long by consulting other persons, after he has ceased to consult himself. He cannot bear to sit still among

unexecuted decisions and unattempted projects. We wait to hear of his achievements, and are confident we shall not wait long. The possibility, or the means, may not be obvious to us, but we know that every thing will be attempted, and that such a mind is like a river, which, in whatever manner it is obstructed, will make its way somewhere. It must have cost Cæsar many anxious hours of deliberation, before he decided to pass the Rubicon; but it is probable he suffered but few to elapse after his decision, before he did pass it. And any one of his friends, who should have been apprized of this determination, and understood his character, would have smiled contemptuously to hear it insinuated that though Cæsar had resolved, Cæsar would not dare; or that though he might cross the Rubicon whose opposite bank presented to him no hostile legions, he might come to other rivers which he would not cross; or that either rivers, or any other obstacle, would deter him from prosecuting the determination from this ominous commencement to its very last consequence.

One signal advantage possessed by a mind of this character, is, that its passions are not wasted. The whole measure of passion of which any mind with important transactions before it, is capable, is not more than enough to supply interest and energy to its practical exertions; and therefore as little as possible of this sacred fire should be expended in a way that does not augment the force of action. But nothing less tends to vigour of action, than protracted anxious fluctuation, intermixed with resolutions de-

cided and revoked, while yet nothing causes a greater expense of feeling. The heart is fretted and exhausted by being subjected to an alternation of contrary excitements, with the ultimate mortifying consciousness of their contributing to no end. The long-wavering deliberation, whether to perform some bold action of difficult virtue, has often cost more to feeling than the action itself, or a series of such actions, would have cost; with the great disadvantage too of being relieved by none of that invigoration, which, to the man in action, would have sprung from the spirit of the action itself, and have renovated the ardour which it was expending. A person of decisive character, by consuming as little passion as possible in dubious musings and abortive resolutions, can secure its utmost value and use, by throwing it all into effectual operation.

Another advantage of this character, is, that it exempts from a great deal of interference and persecution, to which an irresolute man is subjected. Weakness, in every form, tempts arrogance; and a man may be allowed to wish for a kind of character with which stupidity and impertinence may not make so free. When a firm decisive spirit is recognised, it is curious to see how the space clears around a man, and leaves him room and freedom. The disposition to interrogate, dictate, or banter, preserves a respectful and politic distance, judging it not unwise to keep the peace with a person of so much energy. A conviction that he understands, and that he wills with extraordinary force, silences the conceit that intended to perplex or instruct him,

and intimidates the malice that was disposed to attack him. There is a feeling, as in respect of Fate, that the decrees of so inflexible a spirit *must* be right, or that, at least, they *will* be accomplished.

But not only will he secure the freedom of acting for himself, he will obtain also by degrees the coincidence of those in whose company he is to transact the business of life. If the manners of such a man are free from arrogance, and he can clothe his firmness in a moderate degree of insinuation; and if his measures have partly lost the appearance of being the dictates of his will, under the wider and softer sanction of some experience that they are reasonable; both competition and fear will be laid to sleep, and his will may acquire an unresisted ascendency over many, who will be pleased to fall into the mechanism of a system, which they find makes them more successful and happy than they could have been amidst the anxiety of adjusting plans and expedients of their own, and the consequences of often adjusting them ill. I have known several parents, both fathers and mothers, whose management of their families has answered this description, and has displayed a striking example of the facile complacency with which a number of persons, of different ages and dispositions, will yield to the decisions of a firm mind, acting on an equitable and enlightened system.

The last resource of this character, is, hard inflexible pertinacity, on which it may be allowed to rest its strength, after finding it can be effectual in none of its milder forms. I remember

admiring an instance of this kind, in a firm, sagacious, and very estimable old man, whom I well knew, and who is now dead. Being on a jury, in a trial of life and death, he was completely satisfied of the innocence of the prisoner; all the other eleven were of the opposite opinion: but he was resolved that a verdict of guilty should not be brought in. In the first place, he spent several hours in trying to convince them; but found that he made no impression, and that he was fast exhausting the strength which was to be reserved for another mode of operation. He therefore calmly told them, it should now be a trial who would endure confinement and famine the longest, and that they might be quite assured he would sooner die, than release them at the expense of the prisoner's life. In this situation they spent about twenty-four hours; when at length they all acceded to his verdict of acquittal.

It is not necessary to amplify on the indispensible importance of this quality, in order to the accomplishment of any thing eminently good. We instantly see, that every path to signal excellence is so obstructed and beset, that none but a spirit so qualified can pass.—But it is time to examine what are the elements which compose the character.

LETTER II.

PERHAPS the best mode would be, to bring into our thoughts, in succession, the most remarkable examples of this character that we have known in real life, or that we have read of in history or even in fiction, and attentively to observe, in their conversations, manners, and actions, what principles appear to produce, or to constitute, this commanding distinction. You will easily pursue this investigation yourself. I lately made a partial attempt, and shall offer you a number of suggestions.

As a previous observation, it is beyond all doubt that very much depends on the constitution of the body. It is for physiologists to explain the *manner* in which corporeal organization affects the mind; I only assert the fact, that there is in the material construction of some persons, much more than of others, some quality which augments, if it does not create, both the stability of their resolution, and the energy of their active tendencies. There is something that, like the ligatures which one class of the Olympic combatants bound on their hands and wrists, braces round, if I may so describe it, and compresses, the powers of the mind, giving them a steady forcible spring and re-action, which they would presently lose, if they could be transferred into a constitution of soft, yielding, treacherous debility. The action of strong character seems to demand something firm in its corporeal basis, as massive

engines require, for their weight and for their working, to be fixed on a solid foundation. Accordingly I believe it would be found, that a majority of the persons most remarkable for decisive character, have possessed great constitutional firmness. I do not mean an exemption from disease and pain, nor any certain measure of mechanical strength, but a tone of vigour, the opposite to lassitude, and adapted to great exertion and endurance. This is clearly evinced in respect to many of them, by the prodigious labours and deprivations which they have borne in prosecuting their designs. The physical nature has seemed a proud ally of the moral one, and with a hardness that would never shrink, has sustained the energy that could never remit.

A view of the disparities between the different races of animals inferior to man, will shew the effect of organization on disposition. Compare, for instance, a lion with the common beasts of our fields, many of them composed of a larger bulk of animated substance. What a vast superiority of courage, impetuous movement, and determined action; and we attribute this difference to some great dissimilarity of modification in the composition of the animated material. Now it is probable that some difference partly analogous subsists between human bodies, and that this is no small part of the cause of the striking inequalities in respect of decisive character. A very decisive man has probably more of the physical quality of a *lion* in his composition than other men.

It is observable that women in general have less inflexibility of character than men; and though many moral influences contribute to this difference, the principal cause is, probably, something less firm in the corporeal texture. Now one may have in his constitution a firmness of texture, exceeding that of other men in a much greater degree than that by which men in general exceed women.

If there have been found some resolute spirits powerfully asserting themselves in feeble vehicles, it is so much the better; since this would authorize a hope, that if all the other grand requisites can be combined, they may form a strong character, in spite of the counteraction of an unadapted constitution. And on the other hand, no constitutional hardness will form the true character, without those grand principles; though it may produce that false and contemptible kind of decision which we term *obstinacy*; a mere stubbornness of temper, which can assign no reasons but its will, for a constancy which acts in the nature of dead weight rather than of strength; resembling less the re-action of a powerful spring than the gravitation of a big stone.

The first prominent mental characteristic of the person whom I describe, is, a complete confidence in his own judgment. It will perhaps be said, that this is not so uncommon a qualification. I however think it is uncommon. It is indeed obvious enough, that almost all men have a flattering estimate of their own understanding, and that so long as this understanding has no harder task than to form opinions which are not

to be tried in action, they have a most self-complacent assurance of being right. This assurance extends to the judgments which they pass on the proceedings of others. But let them be brought into the necessity of adopting actual measures in an untried proceeding, where, unassisted by any previous example or practice, they are reduced to depend on the resources of pure judgment alone, and you will see, in many cases, this confidence of opinion vanish away.—The mind seems all at once placed in a misty vacuity, where it reaches round on all sides, but can find nothing to take hold of. Or if not lost in vacuity, it is overwhelmed by confusion, and feels as if its faculties were annihilated as soon as it begins to think of schemes and calculations among the possibilities, chances, and hazards, which overspread a wide untrodden field; and this conscious imbecility becomes severe distress, when it is believed that consequences of serious or unknown good or evil are depending on the decisions which are to be formed amidst so much uncertainty. The thought painfully recurs at each step and turn, I may be right, but it is more probable I am wrong. It is like the case of a rustic walking in London, who, having no certain direction through the vast confusion of streets to the place where he wishes to be, advances, and hesitates, and turns, and inquires, and becomes, at each corner, still more inextricably perplexed*.

* "Why does not the man call a hackney-coach?" a gay reader, I am aware, will say of the person so be-mazed in the great town. So he might, certainly; and the gay reader and I have only to deplore that there is no parallel convenience for the assistance of perplexed understandings.

A man in this situation feels he shall be very unfortunate if he cannot accomplish more than he can understand.—Is not this frequently, when brought to the practical test, the state of a mind not much disposed, in general, to undervalue its own sense?

In cases where judgment is not so completely bewildered, you will yet perceive a great practical distrust of it. A man has perhaps advanced a considerable way towards a decision, but then lingers at a small distance from it, till necessity, with a stronger hand than conviction, impels him upon it. He cannot see the whole length of the question, and suspects the part beyond his sight to be the most important, because it *is* beyond. He fears that certain possible consequences, if they should follow, would cause him to reproach himself for his present determination. He wonders how this or the other person would have acted in the same circumstances, eagerly catches at any thing like a respectable precedent, and looks anxiously round to know what each person thinks on the subject; while the various and opposite opinions to which he listens, perhaps only serve to confound his perception of the track of thought by which he had hoped to reach his conclusion. Even when that conclusion is obtained, there are not many minds that might not be brought a few degrees back into dubious hesitation, by a man of respected understanding saying, in a confident tone, Your plan is injudicious; your selection is unfortunate; the event will disappoint you.

It cannot be supposed that I am maintaining such an absurdity as that a man's complete reli-

ance on his own judgment is necessarily a proof of that judgment being correct and strong. Intense stupidity may be in this point the rival of clear-sighted wisdom. I had once a slight kowledge of a person, whom no mortal, not even Cromwell, could have excelled in the article of confidence in his judgment, and consequent inflexibility of conduct; while at the same time his successive schemes were ill-judged to a degree that made his disappointments ridiculous rather than pitiable. He was not an example of that simple obstinacy which I have mentioned before; for he considered his measures, and did not want for reasons which satisfied himself beyond a doubt of their being most judicious. This confidence of opinion may be possessed by a person in whom it will be contemptible or mischievous; but its proper place is in a very different character, and without it there can be no dignified actors in human affairs.

If, after observing how foolish this confidence appears as a feature in a weak character, it be inquired what it is in a justly decisive person's manner of thinking, which authorizes him in this firm assurance that his view of the concerns before him is comprehensive and accurate; I answer, that he is justified in this persuasion, because he is conscious that objects are presented to his mind with an exceedingly distinct and perspicuous aspect, not like the shapes of moon-light, or Ossian's ghosts, dim forms of uncircumscribed shade; because he sees the different points of the subject in an arranged order, not in dispersed fragments; because in each deliberation the main

object keeps its clear pre-eminence, and he perceives the bearings which the subordinate and conducive ones have on it; because perhaps several dissimilar trains of thought lead him to the same conclusion; and because he finds that his judgment does not vary according to the moods of his feelings.

It may be presumed that a high degree of this character is not attained without a considerable measure of experience and observation, though possibly they have been supplied in a comparatively short space of time. These have taught the man by what rule to anticipate the consequences to follow from certain actions in certan situations of affairs, as rationally as what fruit to expect from a certain kind of tree. To some extent therefore he is instructed both how to proceed and what to expect; and as to those new combinations of circumstances which no calculation can foresee, and to which no experience or previous observation will apply, he can trust to the resources which he is persuaded his intellect will open to him, or is humbly confident, if he is a devout man, that the Supreme Intelligence will not suffer to be wanting to him, when the occasion arrives. In proportion as his views include, at all events, more certainties than those of other men, he is less fearful, and has less reason to be fearful, of contingencies. And if in the course of executing his design, unexpected disastrous events should befal, but which are not owing to any thing wrong in the plan and principles of that design, but to foreign causes; it will be characteristic of a strong mind to attri-

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bute these events discriminatively to their own causes, and not to the *plan*, which therefore, instead of being disliked and relinquished, will be still as much approved as before, and the man will proceed calmnly to the sequel of it without any change of arrangement; unless indeed these sinister events should be such as to alter the whole state of things to which the plan was correctly adapted, and so to create a necessity on this account for an entirely new one to be formed.

Without absolutely despising the understandings of other men, he will perceive their dimensions compared with his own, which will preserve its independence through every communication and every encounter. It is however a part of this very independence, that he will hold himself at liberty to alter his opinion, if the information which may be communicated to him, shall give sufficient reason. And as no one is so sensible of the importance of a complete acquaintance with a subject as the man who is always endeavouring to think conclusively, he will listen with the utmost attention to the *information*, which may be received sometimes from persons for whose *understanding* he has no great respect. Counsel will in general have only so much weight with him as it supplies knowledge which may assist his judgment; he will yield nothing to it as authority; but he may hear it with more candour and good temper, from being conscious of this independence of his judgment, than the man who is afraid lest the first person that begins to persuade him, should confound his determi-

nation. He feels it entirely a work of his own to deliberate and to resolve, amidst all the advice which may be attempting to control him. If, with an assurance of his intellect being of the highest order, he also holds a commanding station, he will feel it gratuitous to consult with any one, excepting merely to receive statements of facts. This appears to be exemplified in the man, who has lately shewn the nations of Europe how large a portion of the world may, through the divine permission, be at the mercy of the solitary workings of an individual mind.

The strongest trial of this determined style of judgment is in those cases of urgency, where something must immediately be done, and where the consequences of deciding right or wrong are of great importance; as in the office of a medical man in treating a patient whose situation, while it renders some strong means indispensable, renders it extremely doubtful which ought to be selected. A still stronger illustration is the case of a general, who is compelled, in the very instant, to make dispositions on which the event of a battle, the lives of ten thousand of of his men, or perhaps almost the fate of a nation, may depend. He may even be reduced to choose between two dreadful expedients. Such a dilemma is described in Denon's account of one of the sanguinary conflicts between the French and Mamelukes, as having for a while held Desáix, though a very decisive commander, in a state of anguish.

LETTER III.

THIS indispensable basis, confidence of opinion, is however not enough to constitute the character in question. For many persons, who have been conscious and proud of a much stronger grasp of thought than ordinary men, and have held the most decided opinions on important things to be done, have yet exhibited, in the listlessness or inconstancy of their actions, a contrast and a disgrace to the operations of their understandings. For want of some cogent feeling impelling them to carry every internal decision into action, they have been still left where they were; and a dignified judgment has been seen in the hapless plight of having no effective forces to execute its decrees.

It is evident then, and I perceive I have partly anticipated this article in the first letter, that another essential principle of the character, is, a total incapability of surrendering to indifference or delay the serious determinations of the mind. A strenuous *will* must accompany the conclusions of thought, and constantly urge the utmost efforts for their practical accomplishment. The intellect must be invested, if I may so describe it, with a glowing atmosphere of passion, under the influence of which, the cold dictates of reason take fire, and spring into active powers.

Revert once more in your thoughts to the persons most remarkably distinguished by this decision. You will perceive, that instead of allowing themselves to sit down delighted after the labour of successful thinking, as if they had performed some great thing, they regard this labour but as a circumstance of preparation, and the conclusions resulting from it as of no more value, till applied to the greater labour which is to follow, than the entombed lamps of the Rosicrucians. They are not disposed to be content in a region of mere ideas, while they ought to be advancing into the scene of realities; they retire to that region sometimes, as ambitious adventurers anciently went to Delphi, to consult, but not to reside. You will therefore find them almost uniformly in determined pursuit of some object, on which they fix a keen and steady look, and which they never lose sight of, while they follow it through the confused multitude of other things.

The manner of a person actuated by such a spirit, seems to say, Do you think that I would not disdain to adopt a purpose which I would not devote my utmost force to effect; or that having thus devoted my exertions, I will intermit or withdraw them, through indolence, debility, or caprice; or that I will surrender my object to any interference except the uncontrolable dispensations of Providence? No, I am linked to my determination with iron bands; my purpose is become my fate, and I must accomplish it, unless arrested by calamity or death.

This display of systematic energy seems to indicate a constitution of mind in which the passions are exactly commensurate with the intellectual part, and at the same time hold an inseparable correspondence with it, like the faithful sympathy of the tides with the phases of the moon.—There is such an inequality and connexion, that subjects of the decisions of judgment become proportionally and of course the objects of passion. When the judgment decides with a very strong preference, that same strength of preference, actuating also the passions, devotes them with energy to the object, so long as it is thus approved. If therefore this strong preference of the judgment continues, the passions will be fixed in a state of habitual energy, and this will produce such a conduct as I have described. When therefore a firm, self-confiding judgment fails to make a decisive character, it is evident that either there is in that mind a deficient measure of passion, which makes an indolent or irresolute man; or that the passions perversely sometimes coincide with judgment and sometimes desert it, which makes an inconsistent or versatile man.

There is no man so irresolute as not to act with determination in many single cases, where the motive is powerful and simple, and where there is no need of plan and perseverance; but this gives no claim to the term *character*, which expresses the habitual tenour of a man's active being. The character may be displayed in the successive unconnected undertakings, which are each of limited extent, and end with the attain-

ment of their objects. But it is seen to the greatest advantage in those grand schemes of action, which have no necessary point of conclusion, which continue on through successive years, and extend even to that dark period when the agent himself is withdrawn from human sight.

I have repeatedly remarked to you, in conversation, the effect of what has been called a Ruling Passion. When its object is noble, and an enlightened understanding directs it movements, it appears to me a great felicity; but whether its object be noble or not, it infallibly creates, where it exists in great force, that active, ardent constancy, which I describe as a capital feature of the decisive character. The Subject of such a commanding passion wonders, if indeed he were at leisure to wonder, at the persons who pretend to attach importance to an object which they make none but the most languid efforts to secure. The utmost powers of the man are constrained into the service of the favourite Cause by this passion which sweeps away, as it advances, all the trivial objections and little opposing motives, and seems almost to open a way through impossibilities. This spirit comes on him in the morning as soon as he recovers his consciousness, and commands and impels him through the day with a power from which he could not emancipate himself if he would. When the force of habit is added, the determination becomes invincible, and seems to assume rank with the great laws of nature, making it nearly as certain that such a man will persist in his course as that in the morning the sun will rise.

ned to seize the very first opportunity, of however humble a kind, to gain any money, though it were ever so despicable a trifle, and resolved absolutely not to spend, if he could help it, a farthing of whatever he might obtain. The first thing that drew his attention, was, a heap of coals shot out of carts on the pavement before a house. He offered himself to shovel or wheel them into the place where they were to be laid, and was employed. He received a few pence for the labour; and then, in pursuance of the saving part of his plan, requested some small gratuity of meat and drink, which was given him. He then looked out for the next thing that might chance to offer, and went, with indefatigable industry, through a succession of servile employments, in different places, of longer and shorter duration, still scrupulously avoiding, as far as possible, the expense of a penny. He promptly seized *every* opportunity which could advance his design, without regarding the meanness of occupation or appearance. By this method he had gained, after a considerable time, money enough to purchase, in order to sell again, a few cattle, of which he had taken pains to understand the value. He speedily but cautiously turned his first gains into second advantages; retained without a single deviation his extreme parsimony; and thus advanced by degrees into larger transactions and incipient wealth. I did not hear, or have forgotten, the continued course of his life; but the final result was, that he more than recovered his lost possession, and died an inveterate miser, worth

60,000l. I have always recollected this as a signal instance, though in an unfortunate and ignoble direction, of decisive character, and of the extraordinary *effect*, which according to general laws, belongs to the strongest form of such a character.

But not less decision has been displayed by men of virtue. In this distinction no man ever exceeded, for instance, or ever will exceed, the late illustrious Howard.

The energy of his determination was so great, that if instead of being habitual, it had been shewn only for a short time on particular occasions, it would have appeared a vehement impetuosity; but by being unintermitted, it had an equability of manner which scarcely appeared to exceed the tone of a calm constancy, it was so totally the reverse of any thing like turbulence or agitation. It was the calmness of an intensity kept uniform by the nature of the human mind forbidding it to be more, and by the character of the individual forbidding it to be less. The habitual passion of his mind was a measure of feeling almost equal to the temporary extremes and paroxysms of common minds: as a great river, in its customary state, is equal to a small or moderate one when swollen to a torrent.

The moment of finishing his plans in deliberation, and commencing them in action, was the same. I wonder what must have been the amount of that bribe in emolument or pleasure, that would have detained him a week inactive after their final adjustment. The law which carries water down a declivity, was not more un-

conquerable and invariable than the determination of his feelings toward the main object. The importance of this object held his faculties in a state of excitement which was too rigid to be affected by lighter interests, and on which therefore the beauties of nature and of art had no power. He had no leisure feeling which he could spare to be diverted among the innumerable varieties of the extensive scene which he traversed; all his subordinate feelings lost their separate existence and operation, by falling into the grand one. There have not been wanting trivial minds, to mark this as a fault in his character. But the mere men of taste ought to be silent respecting such a man as Howard; he is above their sphere of judgment. The invisible spirits, who fulfil their commission of philanthropy among mortals, do not care about pictures, statues, and sumptuous buildings; and no more did he, when the time in which he must have inspected and admired them, would have been taken from the work to which he had consecrated his life. The curiosity which he might feel, was reduced to wait till the hour should arrive, when its gratification should be presented by conscience, which kept a scrupulous charge of all his time, as the most sacred duty of that hour. If he was still at every hour, when it came, fated to feel the attractions of the fine arts but the second claim, they might be sure of their revenge; for no other man will ever visit Rome under such a despotic consciousness of duty as to refuse himself time for surveying the magnificence of its ruins. Such a sin against taste is very far be-

yond the reach of common saintship to commit. It implied an inconceivable severity of conviction, that he had *one thing to do*, and that he who would do some great thing in this short life, must apply himself to the work with such a concentration of his forces, as, to idle spectators who live only to amuse themselves, looks like insanity.

His attention was so strongly and tenaciously fixed on his object, that even at the greatest distance, like the Egyptian pyramids to travellers, it appeared to him with a luminous distinctness as if it had been nigh, and beguiled the toilsome length of labour and enterprise by which he was to reach it. It was so conspicuous before him, that not a step deviated from the direction, and every moment and every day was an approximation. As his method referred every thing he did and thought to the end, and as his exertion did not relax for a moment, he made the trial, so seldom made, what is the utmost effect which may be granted to the last possible efforts of a human agent: and therefore what he did not accomplish, he might conclude to be placed beyond the sphere of mortal activity, and calmly leave to the immediate disposal of Omnipotence.

Unless the eternal happiness of mankind be an insignificant concern, and the passion to promote it an inglorious distinction, I may cite George Whitefield, as a noble instance of this attribute of the decisive character, this intense necessity of action. The ardour of his mind carried him through a course of exertions which it would have fatigued a cotemporary biographer to re-

cord; and at the same time threw into each of them a vehement eloquence, at which folly and wickedness were often alarmed as by the assault of a tempest. The great Cause which was so languid a thing in the hands of many of its advocates, assumed in his administrations an unmitigable urgency.

Many of the christian missionaries among the heathens, such as Brainerd, Elliot, and Schwartz, have displayed memorable examples of this dedication of their whole being to their office, this eternal abjuration of all the quiescent feelings.

This would be the proper place for introducing (if I did not hesitate to introduce in any connexion with merely human instances) the example of him who said, "I must be about my Father's business. My meat and drink is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

LETTER IV.

AFTER the illustrations on the last article, it will seem but a very slight transition, when I proceed to specify Courage as an essential part of the decisive character. An intelligent man, adventurous only in thought, may sketch the most excellent scheme, and after duly admiring

it, and himself as its author, may be reduced to say, What a noble spirit that would be which should dare to realize this! A noble spirit! is it I? And his heart may answer in the negative, while he glances a mortified thought of inquiry round to recollect persons who would venture what he dares not, and almost hopes not to find them. Or if by extreme effort he has brought himself to a resolution of braving the difficulty, he is compelled to execrate the timid lingerings that still keep him back from the trial. A man endowed with the complete character, says, with a sober consciousness as remote from the spirit of bravado as it is from timidity, Thus, and thus, is my conviction and my determination; now for the phantoms of fear; let me look them in the face; they will find I am not made of trembling materials; "I dare do all that may become a man." I shall firmly confront every thing that threatens me in the prosecution of my purpose, and I am prepared to meet the consequences of it when it is accomplished. I should despise a being, though it were myself, whose agency could be held enslaved by the gloomy shapes of imagination, by the haunting recollections of a dream, by the whistling or the howling of winds, by the shriek of owls, by the shades of midnight, or by human words or frowns. I should be indignant to feel that in the commencement of an adventure I could think of nothing but the deep pit by the side of the way where I must walk, into which I may slide, the mad animal which it is not impossible that I may meet, or the assassin who may lurk in a thicket of yonder wood. And I

disdain to compromise the interests that rouse me to action, for the privilege of a disgraceful security.

As the conduct of a decisive man is always individual, and often singular, it is to be expected that the trial of courage will sometimes be great. For one thing, he may be encountered by the strongest disapprobation of many of his connexions, and the censure of the greater part of the society where he is known. In this case, it is not a man of common spirit that can shew himself just as at other times, and meet their anger in the same undisturbed manner as he would meet some slight inclemency of the weather; that can, without harshness or violence, continue to effect every moment some part of his design, coolly replying to each ungracious look and indignant voice, I am sorry to oppose you; I am not unfriendly to you, while thus persisting in what excites your displeasure; it would please me to have your approbation and concurrence, and I think I should have them if you would seriously consider my reasons; but meanwhile, I am superior to opinion, I am not to be intimidated by reproaches, nor would your favour and applause be any reward for the sacrifice of my object. As you can do without my approbation, I can certainly do without yours; it is enough that I can approve myself, it is enough that I can appeal to the last authority in the creation.—Amuse yourselves, as you may, by continuing to censure or to rail; *I* shall continue to act: I do not fear you; allow me to go on.

The attack of contempt and ridicule, is perhaps a still greater trial of courage. It is felt by all to be an admirable thing, when it can in no degree be ascribed to the hardness of either stupidity or confirmed depravity, to sustain for a considerable time, or in numerous instances, the looks of scorn, or an unrestrained shower of taunts and jeers, with a perfect composure, which shall immediately after, or even at the time, proceed on the business that provokes all this ridicule. This invincibility of temper will often make even the scoffers themselves tired of the sport: they begin to feel that against such a man it is a poor style of hostility to laugh. There is nothing that people are more mortified to spend in vain than their scorn. Till however a man become a veteran, he must reckon on sometimes meeting this trial; and I instantly know—if I hear him anxiously reply, to an important suggestion of any measure to be adopted, But will they not laugh at me? I know—that he is not the person whom this essay attempts to describe. A man of the right kind would say, They will smile, they will laugh, will they? Much good may it do them. I have something else to do than to trouble myself about their mirth. I do not care if the whole neighbourhood were to laugh in a chorus. I should indeed be sorry to see or hear such a number of fools, but pleased enough to find that they did not consider me as one of their stamp. The good to result from my project will not be less, because vain and shallow minds that cannot understand it, are diverted at it and at me. What should I think of my pur-

suits, if every trivial thoughtless being could comprehend or would applaud them, and of myself, if my courage needed levity and ignorance for their allies, or could shrink at their sneers?

I remember, that on reading the account of the project for conquering Peru, formed by Almagro, Pizarro, and DeLuques, while abhorring the principle and the design of the men, I could not help admiring the hardihood of mind which made them regardless of scorn. These three individuals, before they had obtained any associates, or arms, or soldiers, or exactly knew the power of the kingdom which they were to conquer, celebrated a solemn mass in one of the great churches, as a pledge and a commencement of the enterprise, amidst the astonishment and contempt expressed by a multitude of people for what was deemed a monstrous project. They however proceeded through the service, and afterwards to their respective departments of preparation, with the most entire insensibility to all this triumphant scorn; and thus gave the first proof of possessing that invincible firmness with which they afterwards prosecuted their design, till they attained at length a success over which humanity will for ever weep.

Milton's Abdiel is a noble illustration of the courage that defies scorn.

But in some of the situations where decision of character is to be evinced, a man will be threatened by evils of a darker aspect than disapprobation or contempt. He may apprehend serious sufferings; and very often, to dare as far as conscience or a great cause required, has been to

dare to die. In almost all plans of great enterprise, a man must systematically dismiss, at the entrance, every wish to stipulate for safety with his destiny. He voluntarily treads within the precincts of danger, and though it is possible that he may escape, he ought to be prepared with the fortitude of a victim. This is the inevitable condition on which heroes, travellers or missionaries among savage nations, and reformers on a grand scale, must commence their career. Either they must allay their fire of enterprise, or they must hold themselves in readiness to be exploded by it from the world.

The last decisive energy of a rational courage, which confides in the Supreme Power, is very sublime. It makes a man who intrepidly dares every thing that can oppose or attack him within the whole sphere of mortality; who would retain his purpose unshaken amidst the ruins of the world; who will still press toward his object while death is impending over him.

It was in the true elevation of this character that Luther, when cited to appear at the diet of Worms, under an assurance of safety from very high authority, said to his friends, who conjured him not to go, and justly brought the example of John Huss, who, in a similar situation, and with the same pledge of protection, had notwithstanding been burnt alive, "I am called in the name of God to go, and I would go, though I were certain to meet as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the houses."

A reader of the bible will not forget Daniel, braving in calm devotion the decree which con-

signed him to the den of lions; or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, saying to the tyrant, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter," when the furnace was in sight.

The combination of these several essential principles, constitutes that state of mind, which is the supreme requisite to decision of character, and perhaps its most striking distinction, that is, the full agreement of the mind with itself, the co-operation of all its powers, and all its dispositions.

What an unfortunate task it would be for a charioteer, who had harnessed a set of horses however strong, if he could not make them draw together: if, while one of them would go forward, another was restive, another tried to move back, and another started aside, what could be done? If even one of the four were unmanagebly perverse, while the three were obedient, an aged beggar with his crutch might soon leave Phaeton behind. So in a human being, unless the chief forces act consentaneously, there can be no inflexible vigour, either of will or of execution. *One* dissentient principle in the mind, not only deducts so much from the strength and mass of its agency, but counteracts and embarrasses all the rest. If the judgment holds in low estimation that which yet the passions incline a man to pursue, his pursuit will be irregular and inconstant, though it may have occasional fits of animation, when those passions happen to be strongly stimulated. If there is an opposition between judgment and habit, though the man will probably continue to act mainly under the direction of habit in spite of his opinions, yet

sometimes the intrusion of those opinions will have for the moment an effect like that of Prospero's wand on the limbs of Ferdinand; and to be alternately impelled by habit, and checked by opinion, will be a state of vexatious debility. If two principal passions are opposite to each other, they will utterly distract the strongest mind.—The one may be somewhat stronger than the other, and therefore just prevail barely enough to give a feeble impulse to the conduct of the man; but no powerful impulse can be given, till the disparity of these two rivals becomes greater, in consequence of the gradual weight of habit, or the reinforcement supplied by some new impressions being added to the preponderating passion. The disparity must be no less than an absolute predominance of the one and subjection of the other, before the prevailing passion will have at liberty, if I may so express it, any large measure of its force to throw activity into the system of conduct. If, for instance, a man feels at once the love of fame which is to be gained only by arduous exertions, and an equal degree of the love of pleasure which precludes those exertions; if he is ambitious to shew off in splendour, and yet anxious to save money; if he has the curiosity of adventure, and yet that solicitude for his safety which forbids him to climb a precipice, descend into a cavern, or explore a dangerous wild; if he has the stern will of a tyrant, and yet the relentings of a man; if he has the ambition which would subdue his fellow-mortals, counteracted by the humanity which would not hurt them; we can easily anticipate the irresolute contradic-

tory style of his actions. Especially if conscience, that great troubler of the human breast, loudly declares against a man's wishes or projects, it will be a fatal enemy to decision, till it either reclaim the delinquent passions, or be debauched or murdered by them.

Lady Macbeth may be cited as a harmonious character, though the epithet seems strangely applied. She had capacity, ambition, and courage; and she willed the death of the king. Macbeth had still more capicity, ambition, and courage; and he also willed the murder of the king. But he had, besides, humanity, generosity, conscience, and some measure of what forms the *power* of conscience, the fear of a superior Being. Consequently, when the dreadful moment approached, he felt an insupportable conflict between these opposite principles, and when it was arrived, his utmost courage failed. The worse part of his nature fell prostrate under the power of the better; the angel of goodness arrested the demon that grasped the dagger, and would have taken that dagger away, if the pure demoniac firmness of his wife, who had none of these counteracting principles, had not shamed and hardened him to the deed.

The poet's delineation of Richard III. (I better remember the poet's account of him than the historian's,) gives a dreadful specimen of this indivisibility, if I may so name it, of mental impulse. After his determination was fixed, his whole mind with the compactest fidelity supported him in prosecuting it. Securely privileged from all interference of doubt that could lin-

ger, or humanity that could soften, or timidity that could shrink, he advanced with a grim concentrated constancy through scene after scene of atrocity, still fulfilling his vow to "cut his way through with a bloody axe." He did not waver while he pursued his object, nor relent when he seized it.

Cromwell (whom I mention as a parallel, not to Richard's depravity, but to his inflexible vigour) lost his mental consistency in the latter end of a career distinguished by as much decision as the would ever saw. It appears that the wish to be a king, at last arose in a mind which had execrated royalty, and battled it from the land. As far as he really had any republican principles and partialities, this new desire must have been a very uncomplacent associate for them, and must have produced a schism in the breast where all the strong forces of thought and passion had acted till then in concord. The new form of ambition became just predominant enough to carry him by slow degrees through the embarrassment and the shame of this incongruity into an irresolute determination to assume the crown; so irresolute, that he was reduced again to a mortifying indecision by the remonstrances of some of his friends, which he could easily have slighted, and by an apprehension of the public disapprobation, which he could have braved, if some of the principles of his own mind had not shrunk or revolted from the design. When at last the motives for relinquishing this design prevailed, it was by so small a degree of preponde-

rance, that his reluctant refusal of the offered crown was the voice only of half his soul.

Not only two distinct counteracting passions, but one passion interested for two objects, both equally desirable, but of which the one must be sacrificed, may annihilate in that instance the possibility of determined conduct. I recollect reading in an old divine, a story from an older historian, applicable to this remark. A father went to the agents of a tyrant, to endeavour to redeem his two sons, military men, who with some other captives of war were condemned to die. He offered, as a ransom, to surrender his own life and a large sum of money. The tyrant's agents who had them in charge, informed him that this equivalent would be accepted for one of his sons, and for one only, because they should be accountable for the execution of two persons; he might therefore choose which he would redeem. Anxious to save even one of them thus at the expense of his own life, he yet was utterly unable to decide which should die, by choosing the other to live, and remained in the agony of this dilemma so long that they were both slain.

LETTER V.

It were absurd to suppose that any human being can attain a state of mind capable of acting in all instances invariably with the full power of de-

termination; but it is obvious that many have possessed an habitual and very commanding measure of it; and I am persuaded that the preceding remarks have taken account of its chief characteristics and constituent principles. A number of additional observations remain.

The slightest view of human affairs shews what fatal and ample mischief may be caused by men of this character, when misled or wicked. You have but to recollect the conquerors, despots, bigots, unjust conspirators, and signal villains of every class, who have blasted society by the relentless vigour which could act consistently and heroically wrong. Till therefore the virtue of mankind be greater, there is reason to be pleased that so few of them are endowed with extraordinary decision.

When this character is dignified by wisdom and principle, great care is yet required in the possessors of it to prevent it from becoming unamiable. As it involves much practical assertion of superiorty over other human beings, the manner ought to be as mild and conciliating as possible; else pride will feel provoked, affection hurt, and weakness oppressed. But this is not the manner which the man whom I am considering, will be naturally most inclined to wear. Rather, he will have a manner of sternness, reserve, and incompliance. He will have the appearance of keeping himself always at a distance from social equality; and his friends will feel as if their friendship were continually sliding into subserviency, while his intimate connexions will think he does not attach the due importance either to their

opinions or to their regard. His manner, when they differ from him, or complain, will be in danger of giving the impression of careless inattention, and sometimes of disdain.

When he can accomplish a design in his own person alone, he may separate himself to the work with the cold self-inclosed individuality on which no one has any hold, which seems to recognise no kindred being in the world, which takes little account of good wishes and kind concern, any more than it cares for opposition, which seeks neither aid nor sympathy, and which seems to say, I do not want any of you, and I am glad that I do not; leave me alone to succeed or die. This has a very repellent effect on the friends who wished to feel themselves of some little importance, in some way or other, to a person whom they are constrained to respect. When assistance is indispensable to his undertakings, his mode of signifying it will seem rather to command the co-operation than to invite it.

In consultation, his manner will indicate that when he is equally with the rest in possession of the circumstances of the case, he does not at all expect to hear any opinions that shall correct his own, but is satisfied that either his own conception of the subject is the just one, or that his own mind must originate that which shall be so. This striking difference will be apparent between him and his associates, that *their* manner of receiving *his* opinions is that of agreement or dissent; *his* manner of receiving *theirs* is that of sanction or rejection. He has the tone of authoritatively deciding on what they say, but never of

submitting to decision what himself says. Their coincidence with his views does not give him a firmer assurance of his being right, nor their dissent any other impression than that of their incapacity to judge. If his feeling took the distinct form of a reflection, it would be, Mine is the business of comprehending and devising, and I am here to rule this company, and not to consult them; I want their docility and not their arguments; I am come, not to seek their co-operation in thinking, but to induce their concurrence in executing what is already thought for them. Of course, many suggestions and reasons which appear important to those from whom they come, will be disposed of by him with a transient attention or a light facility, that will seem very disrespectful to persons who possibly hesitate to admit the full persuasion that he is a demi-god, and that they are but insects. Lord Chatham, in going out of the House of Commons, just as one of the speakers against him concluded his speech by emphatically urging what he perhaps rightly thought the unanswerable question, "*Where* can we find means to support such a war?" turned round a moment, and gaily replied, "Gentle shepherd, tell me where."

Even the assenting convictions, and practical compliances, yielded by degrees to this decisive man, may be somewhat undervalued; as they will appear to him no more than simply coming, and that perhaps very slowly, to a right apprehension; whereas himself understood and decided justly from the first, and has been right all this while.

He will be in danger of extending but little tolerance to the prejudices, hesitation, and timidity, of those with whom he has to act. He will say to himself, I wish there were any thing like manhood among the beings called men; and that they could have the sense and spirit not to let themselves be hampered by so many silly notions and childish fears. Why cannot they either determine and proceed with some promptitude and vigour, or let me, that can, do it for them? Am I to wait till debility become strong, and folly wise? If full scope be allowed to these tendencies, they will make even a man of elevated virtue a tyrant, who, while he is conscious of the rectitude of his designs, will be regardless of every thing but the accomplishment of them. He will forget all respect for the feelings and liberties of beings who are to be regarded as but a subordinate machinery, to be actuated, or to be thrown aside when not actuated, by the spring of his commanding spirit.

I have before asserted that this strong character may be exhibited with a mildness of manner, and that it will thus best secure its efficacy. But this mildness must often be at the cost of great effort; and how much considerate policy or benevolent forbearance it will require, for a man to exert his utmost vigour in the very task, as it will appear to him at the time, of cramping that vigour! Lycurgus appears to have been a high example of mild patience in the firm prosecution of designs which were to be effected among a perverse multitude.

It is probable that the men most distinguished for decision, have not, in general, possessed a large share of tenderness; and it is easy to imagine that the laws according to which our nature is formed, will with great difficulty allow the combination of the refined sensibilities with a hardy, never-shrinking, never-yielding constancy. Is it not almost of the essence of this constancy to be free from even the *perception* of such impressions as cause a mind, weak through susceptibility, to relax or to waver; just as the skin of the elephant, or the armour of the rhinoceros, would scarcely even feel the application of a force by which a small animal, with a skin of thin and delicate texture, would be pierced or lacerated to death? No doubt, this firmness consists partly in overcoming feelings, but it may consist partly too in not having them. To be tremblingly alive to gentle impressions, and yet to be able to preseve, when the prosecution of a design requires it, an immovable heart, amidst even the most imperious causes of subduing emotion, is perhaps not an impossible constitution of mind, but it is the utmost and the rarest endowment of humanity.

If you take a view of the first rank of decisive men, you will observe that their faculties have been too much bent to arduous effort, their souls have been kept in too military an attitude, they have been begirt with too much iron, for the melting movements of the heart. Their whole being appears too much arrogated and occupied by the spirit of severe design, compelling them to work systematically toward some defined end, to be

sufficiently at ease for the indolent complacency, the soft lassitude, of gentle affections, which love to surrender themselves to the present felicities, forgetful of all "enterprises of great pith and moment." The man seems rigorously intent still on his own affairs, as he walks, or regales, or mingles with domestic society; and appears to despise all the feelings that will not take rank with the grave labours and decisions of intellect, or coalesce with the unremitting passion which is his spring of action: he values not feelings which he cannot employ either as weapons or as engines. He loves to be actuated by a passion so strong as to compel into exercise the utmost force of his being, and fix him in a tone, compared with which, the gentle affections, if he had felt them, would be accounted tameness, and their exciting causes, insipidity.

Yet we cannot willingly allow that tenderness is totally incompatible with the most impregnable inflexibility that can exist in the world; nor can we help believing that such men as Timoleon, Alfred, and Gustavus Adolphus, must have been very fascinating domestic associates, whenever the urgency of their affairs would allow them to withdraw from the interests of statesmen and warriors, to indulge the affections of men: most fascinating, for, with a relative or friend who had any perceptions, all the value of their stronger character would be recognised in the gentler one; the man whom nothing could subdue, would exalt the quality of the tenderness which softened him to recline.

But it were much easier to enumerate a long train of ancient and modern names of men who have had the decision without the softness. Perhaps indeed they have yielded sometimes to some species of love, as a mode of amusing their passions for an interval, till greater engagements have summoned them into their proper element; when they have shewn how little the sentiment ever belonged to the heart, by the ease with which they could relinquish the temporary favourite. In other cases, where there have not been the selfish inducements, which this passion supplies, to the exhibition of something like tenderness, and where they have been left to the pure sympathies of humanity alone, no rock on the face of the earth could be harder.

The late celebrated King of Prussia occurs to me at this moment, as a capital instance of the decisive character; and there occurs to me, at the same time, one of the anecdotes of his life. Intending to make, in the night, an important movement in his camp, which was in sight of the enemy, he gave orders that by eight o'clock all the lights in the camp should be put out, on pain of death. The moment that the time was past, he walked out himself to see whether all were dark. He found a light in the tent of a Captain Zietern, which he entered just as the officer was folding up a letter. Zietern knew him, and instantly fell on his knees to entreat his mercy. The king asked to whom he had been writing; he said it was a letter to his wife, which he had retained the candle these few minutes beyond the time in order to finish. The king coolly ordered

him to rise, and write one line more, which he should dictate. This line was to inform his wife, without any explanation, that by such an hour the next day, he should be a dead man. The letter was then sealed, and dispatched as it had been intended; and, the next day, the captain was executed. I say nothing of the justice of the punishment itself; but this cool barbarity to the affection both of the officer and his wife, was enough to brand the character indelibly. It proved how little the philosopher and decisive hero was susceptible of such an affection, or capable of sympathizing with its pains.

At the same time, it is proper to observe, that the case may easily occur, in which a man *must* be resolute to act in a manner which may make him appear to want the finer feelings. He must do what he knows will cause pain to persons who will feel it severely. He may be obliged to resist affectionate wishes, expostulations, entreaties, and tears. Take this same instance. If the wife of Zietern had come to supplicate for him, not only the remission of the punishment of death, but an exemption from any other severe punishment, which was perhaps justly due to the violation of such an order, on so important an occasion, it had then probably been the duty and virtue of the commander to deny the most interesting suppliant, and to resist the most pathetic appeals which could have been made to his feelings.

LETTER VI.

VARIOUS assignable circumstances may contribute much to confirm the character in question. I shall just notice two or three.

And first, *opposition*. The passions which inspirit men to resistance, and sustain them in it, such as anger, indignation, and resentment, are evidently far stronger than those which have reference to friendly objects; and if any of these strong passions are frequently excited by opposition, they infuse a certain quality into the general temperament of the mind, which remains after the immediate excitement is past. They continually strengthen the principle of re-action; they put the mind in the habitual array of defence and self-assertion, and often give it the aspect and the posture of a gladiator, when there appears no confronting combatant. When these passions are felt by the man whom I describe, it is probable that each excitement is followed by a greater increase of this principle of re-action than in other men, because this result is so congenial with his naturally resolute disposition. Let him be opposed then, through the whole course of an extended design, or in the general tenour of his actions; and this constant opposition would render him the service of an ally by corroborating his inflexibility. An irresolute mind indeed might be quelled and subjugated by a formidable kind of opposition; but the strong wind which blows out a taper, augments a pow-

erful fire, if there is fuel enough, to an indefinite intensity.

I believe you will find in fact that many of the individuals most eminently decisive in conduct, have made their way through opposition and contest, in which they have acquired both a prompt acuteness of faculty, and an inflexibility of temper, which even strong minds could never have attained in the tame security of facile friendly coincidence. Very often however, it is granted, the firmness matured by such discipline, is accompanied, in a man of virtue, with a Catonic severity, and in a mere man of the world, with an unhumanized repulsive hardness.

Desertion is another cause which may conduce to consolidate this character. A kind mutually reclining dependence, is certainly the happiest state of human beings; but this necessarily prevents the developement of some great individual powers which would be forced into action by a state of desertion. I lately noticed, with some surprise, an ivy, which being prevented from attaching itself to the rock beyond a certain point, had shot off into a bold elastic stem, with an air of as much independence as any branch of oak in the vicinity. So a human being, thrown, whether by cruelty, justice, or accident, from all social support and kindness, if he has any vigour of spirit, and is not in the bodily debility of either childhood or age, will instantly begin to act for himself with a resolution which will appear like a new faculty. And the most absolute inflexibility is likely to characterise the resolution of an individual who is obliged to delib-

erate without consultation, and execute without assistance. He will disdain to concede to beings that have rejected him, or to forego a single particle of his designs or advantages for the sake of the opinions or the will of all the world. Himself, his pursuits, and his interests, are emphatically his own. "The world is not his friend, nor the world's law," and therefore he becomes regardless of every thing but its power. If this person has but little humanity or principle, he will become a misanthrope, or perhaps a villain, that will resemble a solitary wild beast of the night, which makes prey of every thing it can overpower, and cares for nothing but fire.

If he is capable of grand conception and enterprise, he may, like Spartacus, make a daring attempt against the whole social order of the state where he has been oppressed. If he has great humanity and principle, he may become one of the noblest of mankind, and display a generous virtue to which society had no claim, and which it is not worthy to reward, if it should at last become inclined. No, he will say, give your rewards to another; as it has been no part of my object to gain them, they are not necessary to my satisfaction. I have done good, without expecting your gratitude, and without caring for your approbation. If conscience and my Creator had not been more auspicious than you, none of these virtues would ever have opened to the day. When I ought to have been an object of your compassion, I might have perished; now, when you find I can serve your interest, you will affect to acknowledge me and reward me; I will

not accept your rewards—In either case, virtuous or wicked, the man who has been compelled to do without assistance, will spurn interference.

Common life would supply illustrations of the effect of desertion. A number of resolute men have become such, partly from being left friendless in early life. The case has also sometimes happened, that a wife and mother, remarkable perhaps for gentleness and acquiescence before, has been compelled, after the death of the husband on whom she depended, and when she has met with nothing but neglect or unkindness from relatives and those who had been deemed friends, to adopt a plan of her own, and has executed it with a resolution which has astonished even herself.

I am sorry that the signal examples which occur to my memory under this article, whether real or fictitious, are still of the depraved order. I fancy myself to see Marius sitting on the ruins of Carthage, where no arch or column that remained unshaken amidst the desolation, could present a stronger image of a firmness beyond the power of calamitous events to subdue. The rigid constancy which had before distinguished his character, would be aggravated by his finding himself thus an outcast from all human society; and he would proudly shake off every sentiment that had ever for an instant checked his designs by reminding him of social obligations. The lonely individual was placed in the alternative of becoming the victim or the antagonist of the power of the empire. While with a spirit capable of confronting that power, he probably amidst

those ruins resolved on a great experiment, he would enjoy a kind of sullen luxury in surveying the dreary situation, and recollecting the circumstances of his expulsion; since they would seem to him to sanction an unlimited vengeance, to present what had been his country as the pure legitimate prize for desperate achievement, and to give him a proud consequence in being reduced singly to maintain a quarrel against mankind. He would exult that his desolate condition gave him a proof of his possessing a mind which no misfortunes could repress or intimidate, and that it kindled an animosity intense enough to force that mind from firm endurance into impetuous action. He would feel as if he became stronger for enterprise, in proportion as he became more inexorable; and the sentiment with which he quitted his solitude would be, Rome expelled her patriot, let her receive her evil genius.

The decision of Satan, in Paradise Lost, is represented as consolidated by his reflections on his hopeless banishment from heaven, which oppress him with sadness for a moment, but he soon resumes his invincible tone, and utters the impious but sublime sentiment :

"What matter where, if I be still the same?"

You remember how this effect of desertion is represented in that most striking combination of qualities, perhaps, that poetry ever embodied in one human individual, Charles de Moor. His father's supposed cruel rejection consigned him irretrievably to the career of atrocious enterprise, in which, notwithstanding the most inter-

esting emotions of humanity and tenderness, he persisted with heroic determination till he considered his destiny as accomplished.

Success tends considerably to reinforce this character. It is true that a man possessing it in a high degree will not lose it by occasional failure; for if the failure was caused by something entirely beyond the reach of all human knowledge and ability, he will remember that fortitude is the virtue required in meeting unfavourable events which in no sense depended on him; if by something which *might* have been known and prevented, he will feel that even the experience of failure augments his competence, by admonishing his prudence, and enlarging his understanding. But as all schemes and measures of action have reference to some end; and if wise, are correctly adapted to attain that end, continual failure would shew something essentially wrong in a man's system, and either destroy his confidence, or prove it to be mere absurdity or obstinacy. On the contrary, when a man has ascertained by experiment the justness of his calculations and the extent of his powers, when he has measured his force with various persons, when he has braved and conquered difficulty, and partly seized the prize, he will advance with increasing assurance to the trials which still await him.

In some men whose lives have been spent in constant perils, continued success has produced a confidence beyond its rational effect, by inspiring a persuasion that the common laws of human affairs were, in their case, superseded by the de-

crees of a peculiar destiny, securing them from the possibility of disaster; and this superstitious feeling, though it has displaced the unconquerable resolution from its rational basis, has yet often produced the most wonderful effects. This persuasion dictated Cæsar's expression to the mariner who was terrified at the storm and billows, "What art thou afraid of? Thy vessel carries Cæsar." This idea had some influence among the intrepid men in the time of the English Commonwealth.

The wilfulness of an obstinate person is sometimes fortified by some single instance of remarkable success in his undertakings, which is promptly recalled in every case where his decisions are questioned or opposed, as a proof that he must in this instance too be right; especially if that one success happened contrary to your predictions.

I shall only add, and without illustration, that the habit of associating with *inferiors*, among whom a man can always, and therefore does always, take the lead, is very conducive to a subordinate kind of decision of character. You may see this exemplified any day in an ignorant country 'squire among his vassals; especially if he wears the superadded majesty of Justice of the Peace.

In viewing the characters and actions of the men who have possessed the supreme degree of the quality which I have attempted to describe, one cannot but wish it were possible to know how much of this astonishing superiority was created by the circumstances in which they were placed;

but it seems inevitable to believe that there was some vast difference from ordinary men in the very structure of the mind. In observing lately a man who appeared too vacant almost to think of a purpose, too indifferent to resolve upon it, and too sluggish to execute it if he had resolved, I was distinctly struck with the idea of the difference between him and Marius, of whom I happened to have been thinking; and I felt it utterly beyond my power to believe that any circumstances on earth, though ever so perfectly combined and adapted, would have produced in this man, if placed under their fullest influence from his childhood, any resemblance (beyond perhaps a diminutive kind of revenge and cruelty) of the formidable Roman.

It is needless to discuss whether a person who is practically evinced, at the age of maturity, to want the essential stamina of this character, can, by any process, acquire it. Indeed such a person cannot have sufficient force of *will* to make the complete experiment. If there is the unconquerable *will* that would persist to seize all possible means, and apply them in order to attain such an end, it would prove the existence already of a high degree of the character sought; and if there is not this *will*, how then is the supposed attainment possible?

Yet though it is improbable that a very irresolute man can ever become an habitually decisive one, it should be observed, that as there are many degrees of determined character, and some very defective ones, it might be possible to apply a discipline which should advance a man from

the first degree to the second, and from that to the third, and how much further I cannot tell; he may try. I have but a very imperfect conception of the discipline; I will suggest a hint or two.

And in the first place, the indispensable necessity of a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the concerns before us, seems too obvious for remark; and yet perhaps no man has been sufficiently sensible of it, till he has been placed in circumstances which forced him to act, before he had time, or after he had made ineffectual efforts, to obtain the needful information. The pain of having brought things to an unfortunate issue, is hardly greater than that of proceeding in the conscious ignorance which continually threatens such an issue. While thus proceeding under the constraint of necessity, and without plan or guide, a man looks round for information as eagerly as a benighted wanderer would for the light of a human dwelling. He perhaps labours to recall what he thinks he once heard or read in relation to a similsr situation, without dreaming at the time he heard or read it, that such instruction could ever be of importance to him; and is distressed to find that he cannot accurately recollect it. He would give a considerable sum, if some particular book could be brought to him at the instant. He thinks how many people know, without its being of any use to them, exactly what would be of such service to him, if he could know it. In some cases, a line, a sentence, a monosyllable of affirming or denying, or a momentary sight of an object, would be in-

expressibly valuable and welcome. And he resolves that if he can once happily escape from the present difficulty, he will apply himself day and night to obtain knowledge rather than be so involved and harassed again. It might even be of service to have been occasionally forced to act under the disadvantage of conscious ignorance, if the affair was not very important, nor the consequence very injurious, as an effectual lesson on the necessity of knowledge in order to decision either of plan or of execution. It is indeed a most extreme case that will compel a considerate man to act without knowledge; yet he may be often necessitated to proceed to action, when he is sensible his information does not extend to the whole of the concern in which he is going to commit himself. And in this case, he will feel no little uneasiness, even while transacting that part of it in which his knowledge is competent, when he looks forward to the point where that knowledge terminates; unless he is conscious of a very prompt faculty of catching information at the moment that he wants it for use, as Indians set out on a long journey with but a small stock of provision, because they are certain that their bows or guns will procure it by the way. It is one of the nicest points of wisdom to decide how much less than complete knowledge, in any question of practical interest, will warrant a man to venture on an undertaking, in the presumption that the deficiency will be supplied in time to prevent either perplexity or disaster.

A thousand familiar instances show the effect of perfect knowledge on determination. An ar-

tisan may be said to be decisive as to the mode of working a piece of iron or wood, because he is certain of the proper process and the effect. A man perfectly acquainted with the intricate paths of a district, selects the right path with a satisfied instantaneous promptitude; while a stranger who has only some very vague information, is lost in perplexity. It is easy to imagine what a number of circumstances may occur in the course of a life or even of a year, in which a man cannot thus readily determine, and thus confidently proceed, without an extent and an exactness of knowledge which few persons have application enough to acquire.

In connexion with the necessity of knowledge, I would suggest the importance of cultivating, with the utmost effort, a conclusive manner of reasoning. In the first place, let the general course of thinking *be* reasoning; for it should be remembered that this name does not belong to a series of thoughts and fancies which follow one another without deduction or dependence, and which can therefore no more bring a subject to a proper issue, than a number of separate links will answer the mechanical purpose of a chain. The conclusion which terminates such a series, does not deserve the name of *result*, since it has little more than a casual connexion with what went before; the conclusion might as well have taken place at an earlier point of the train, or have been deferred till that train had been extended much further. Instead of having been busily employed in this kind of thinking, for perhaps many hours, a man might as well have

been sleeping all the time, since the single thought which is now to determine his conduct, might have happened to be the first thought that occurred to him on awaking. It only *happens* to occur to him now; it does not follow from what he has been thinking all these hours; at least, he cannot prove that some other thought might not just as properly have come in its place, at the end of this long series. It is easy to see how feeble that determination is likely to be, which is formed on so narrow a ground as the last accidental idea that comes into the mind, or on so loose a ground as this crude uncombined assemblage of ideas. Indeed it is difficult to form a determination at all on such slight ground. A man delays, and waits for some more satisfactory thought to occur to him; and perhaps he has not waited long, before an idea arises in his mind of a quite contrary tendency to the last. As this additional idea is not, more than that which preceded it, the result of any process of reasoning, nor brings with it any arguments, it is likely to give place soon to another, and yet another; and they are all in succession of equal authority, that is, of none. If at last an idea occurs to him which seems of considerable authority, he may here make a stand, and adopt his resolution, with firmness, as he thinks, and commence the execution. But still, as he cannot *verify* the authority of the principle which has determined him, his resolution is likely to prove treacherous and evanescent in any serious trial. A principle so little defined and established by sound reasoning, is not terra firma for a man to trust himself upon; it is only as

a slight incrustation on a yielding element; it is like the sand on the surface of the lake Serbonis, which broke away under the unfortunate army which had begun to advance on it, mistaking it for solid ground.—These remarks may seem to refer only to a *single instance* of deliberation; but they are equally applicable to all the deliberations and undertakings of a man's life: the same closely connected manner of thinking, which is so necessary to give firmness of determination and of conduct in a particular instance, will, if habitual, greatly contribute to form a decisive character.

Not only should thinking be thus reduced, by a rigid discipline, to a train, in which all the parts at once depend upon and support one another, but also this train should be followed on to a full conclusion. It should be held as an absolute law, that the question must be disposed of before it is let alone. The mind may carry on this accurate process to some length, and then stop through indolence, or divert through levity; but it can never possess that rational confidence in its opinions which is requisite to the character in question, till it is conscious of acquiring them from trains of reasoning which are completely followed to their result. The habit of thinking thus completely is indispensable to the character in general; and in any particular instance, it is found that short pieces of trains of reasoning, though correct as far as they go, are inadequate to qualify a man for the immediate concern. They are besides of little value for the assistance of future thinking; because from

being left thus incomplete, they are but slightly retained by the mind, and soon sink away; in the same manner as walls left unfinished speedily moulder.

After these remarks, I should take occasion to observe, that a vigorous exercise of thought may sometimes for a while seem to increase the difficulty of decision, by discovering a great number of unthought-of reasons for a measure and against it, so that even a discriminating mind may during a short space find itself in the state of the magnetic needle under the equator. But no case in the world can really have this perfect equality of opposite reasons, nor will it long appear to have it, in the estimate of a clear and strongly exerted intellect, which after some time will ascertain, though the difference is small, which side of the question has twenty, and which has but nineteen.

Another thing that would powerfully assist toward complete decision, both in the particular instance, and in the general spirit of the character, is for a man to place himself in a situation like that in which Cæsar placed his soldiers, when he burnt the ships which brought them to land. If his judgment is *really* decided, let him commit himself irretrievably by doing something which shall compel him to do more, which shall necessitate him to do all. If a man resolves as a general intention to be a philanthropist, I would say to him, Form some actual plan of philanthropy, and begin the execution of it to-morrow, (I should say *to-day*,) so explicitly, that you cannot relinquish it without becoming despicable even in your own

estimation. If a man would be a hero, let him, if it is possible to find a good cause in arms, go instantly to the camp. If a man would be a traveller through distant countries, let him actually prepare to set off. Let him not still dwell, in imagination, on mountains, rivers, and temples, but give directions about his remittances, his clothes, or the carriage, or the vessel, in which he is to go. Ledyard surprised the official person who asked him how soon he could be ready to set off for the interior of Africa, by replying promptly and firmly, "To-morrow."

Again, it is highly conducive to a manly firmness, that the interests in which it is exerted, should be of a dignified order, so as to give the passions an ample scope, and a noble object. The degradation that should devote these passions to mean and trivial pursuits, would in general, I should think, likewise debilitate their energy, and therefore preclude strength of character.

And finally, if I would repeat that one should think a man's own conscientious approbation of his conduct must be of vast importance to his decision in the outset, and his persevering constancy, I must at the same time acknowledge that it is astonishing to observe how many of the eminent examples have been very wicked men. These must certainly be deemed also examples of the original want, or the depravation, or the destruction, of the moral sense.

I am sorry, and I attribute it to defect of memory, that a greater proportion of the illustrations which I have introduced, are not as con-

spicuous for goodness as for power. It is melancholy to contemplate beings, whom our imagination represents as capable, (when they possessed great external means in addition to the force of their minds,) of the grandest utility, capable of vindicating each good cause which has languished in a world adverse to all goodness, and capable of intimidating the collective vices of a nation or an age—becoming themselves the very centres and volcanoes of those vices; and it is melancholy to follow them in serious thought from this region, of which not all the powers and difficulties and inhabitants together could have subdued their adamantine resolution, to the Supreme Tribunal where that resolution must tremble and melt away.

ESSAY III.

On the Application of the Epithet Romantic.

LETTER I.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

A THOUGHTFUL judge of sentiments, books, and men, will often find reason to regret that the language of censure is so easy and so undefined. It costs no labour, and needs no intellect, to pronounce the words, foolish, stupid, dull, odious, absurd, ridiculous. The weakest or most uncultivated mind may therefore gratify its vanity, laziness, and malice, all at once, by a prompt application of vague condemnatory words, where a wise and liberal man would not feel himself warranted to pronounce without the most deliberate consideration, and where such consideration might perhaps terminate in applause. Thus the most excellent performances, whether in the department of thinking or of action, might be consigned to contempt, if there were no better judges, on the authority of those who could not even understand them. A man who wishes some decency and sense to prevail in the circulation of opinions, will do

well, when he hears these decisions of ignorant arrogance, to call for a precise explication of the manner in which the terms apply to the subject.

There is a competent number of words for this use of cheap censure; but though a man deems himself to be giving no mean proof of sagacity in this confident readiness to condemn, even with this impotence of language, he may however have a certain consciousness that there is, in some other minds, a keen dexterity which would find expressions to bite harder than the words, dull, stupid, and ridiculous, which he is repeating many times to compensate for the incapacity of hitting off the right thing at once. These vague epithets describe nothing, discriminate nothing; they express no species, are as applicable to ten thousand things as to this one, and he has before employed them on a numberless diversity of subjects. But he can perceive that censure or contempt has the smartest effect, when its expressions have an appropriate peculiarity, which adapts them more precisely to the present subject than to another, and he is therefore not quite satisfied with the expressions which say "about it and about it," but do not say the thing itself, which rather shew his mischievous will than prove his mischievous power. He wants words and phrases which would make the edge of his clumsy meaning fall just where it ought. Yes, he wants words; for his meaning is sharp, he knows, if only the words would come. Discriminative censure must be conveyed, either in a sentence which expresses some marked and acute turn of thought, instead of

simply applying an epithet, or in an epithet so specifically appropriate, that the single word is sufficient to fix the condemnation by the mere precision with which it describes. But as the censurer perhaps cannot succeed in either of these ways, he is willing to seek some other resource. And he may often find it in cant terms, which have a more spiteful force, and seem to have more particularity of meaning, than plain common words, without needing any shrewdness for their application. Each of these is supposed to denominate some one class or character of scorned or reprobated things, but leaves it so imperfectly defined, that dull malice may venture to assign to the class any thing which it would desire to throw under the odium of the denomination. Such words serve for a mode of collective execution, somewhat like the vessels which, in a season of outrage in a neighbouring country, received a promiscuous crowd of reputed criminals, of unexamined and dubious similarity, and were then sunk in the flood. You cannot wonder that such compendious words of decision, which can give quick vent to crude impatient censure, emit plenty of antipathy in a few syllables, and save the condemner the difficulty of telling exactly what he wants to mean, should have had an extensive circulation.

Puritan was, doubtless, welcomed as a term of most lucky invention, when it was first applied in contempt to a class of men, of whom the world was not worthy. Its peculiarity gave it almost such an advantage as that of a proper name, among the lumber of common words by

which they were described and reviled; while yet it meant any thing, every thing, which the vain world disliked in the devout character. The genius who first struck it out would feel that he had done something better than his companions, after they had perfectly tired themselves with repeating the meagre detail, "demure rogues," "sanctimonious pretenders," "formal hypocrites."

This term has long since lost its point, and is almost forgotten; but some word of a similar cast was indispensably necessary to the vulgar of both kinds. The vain and malignant spirit which had decried the elevated piety of the Puritans, sought about (as Milton describes the wicked one in paradise) for some convenient form in which it might again come forth to hiss at zealous christianity, and in another lucky moment fell on the term *Methodist*. If there is no *sense* in the word, as now applied, there seems however to be a great deal of aptitude and execution. It has the advantage of being comprehensive as a general denomination, and yet opprobrious as a special badge, for every thing that ignorance and folly may mistake for fanaticism, or that malice may wilfully assign to it. Whenever a grave formalist feels it his duty to sneer at those operations of religion on the passions, which he never felt, he has only to call them *methodistical*; and notwithstanding that the word is both so trite and so vague, he feels as if he had uttered a good pungent thing. There is satiric smartness in the word, though there be none in the man. In default of keen faculty in the mind, it is delightful

thus to find something that will do as well, ready bottled up in odd terms. It is not less convenient to a profligate, or a coxcomb, whose propriety of character is to be supported by laughing indiscriminately at religion in every form; the one, to evince that his courage is not sapped by conscience, the other, to make the best advantage of his instinct of catching at impiety as a substitute for sense. The word *Methodism* so readily sets aside all religion as superstitious folly, that they pronounce it with an air as if no more needed to be said. Such terms have a pleasant facility of throwing away the matter in question to scorn, without any trouble of making a definite intelligible charge of extravagance or delusion, and attempting to prove it.

In politics, *Jacobinism* has, of late years, been the brand by which all sentiments alluding to the principles of liberty, in a way that could be taken to censure the measures of the ascendant party in the State, have been consigned to execration. What a quantity of noisy zeal would have been quashed in dead silence, if it had been possible to enforce the substitution of statements and definitions for this unmeaning, vulgar, but most efficacious term of reproach. What a number of persons have vented the super-abundance of their fidelity, or their rancour, by means of this and two or three similar words, who, if by some sudden lapse of memory they had lost these two or three words, and a few names of persons, would have looked round with an idiotic vacancy, totally at a loss what was the *subject* of their anger or their approbation. One may here catch a

glimpse of the policy of men of a superior class, in employing these terms as much as the vulgar, in order to keep them in active currency. If a rude populace, whose understandings they despise, and do not wish to improve, could not be excited and kept up to loyal animosity, but by means of a clear comprehension, of what they were to oppose, and why, a political party would have but feeble hold on popular zeal, and might vociferate, and intrigue, and fret itself to nothing. But if a single word can be made the symbol of all that is absurd and execrable, so that the very sound of it shall irritate the passions of this ignorant and scorned multitude, as dogs have been taught to bark at the name of a neighbouring tyrant, it is a commodious thing for managing these passions to serve the interests of those who despise, while they flatter, their duped auxiliaries. The popular passions are the imps and demons of the political conjuror, and he can raise them, as other conjurors affect to do theirs, by terms of gibberish.

The epithet *romantic* has obviously no similarity to these words in its coinage, but it is considerably like them in the mode and effect of its application. For having partly quitted the rank of plain epithets, it has become a convenient exploding word, of more special deriding significance than the other words of its order, such as wild, extravagant, visionary. It is a standard expression of contemptuous dispatch, which you have often heard pronounced with a very self-complacent air, that said, "How much wiser I am than some people," by the indolent and inan-

imate on what they deemed impracticable, by the apes of prudence on what they accounted foolishly adventurous, and by the slaves of custom on what startled them as singular. The class of absurdities which it denominates, is left so undefined, that all the views and sentiments which a narrow cold mind could not like or understand in an ample and fervid one, might be referred hither; and yet the word *seems* to discriminate their character so conclusively as to put them out of argument. With this cast of significance, and vacancy of sense, it is allowed to depreciate without being accountable; it has the license of a parrot, to call names without being taxed with insolence. And when any sentiments are decisively stigmatized with this denomination, it would require considerable courage to rescue and defend them; for as the epithet *romantic* is always understood to deny sound reason to whatever it is fixed upon, the advocate may expect to be himself enrolled among the heroes of whom Don Quixote is the time immemorial commander-in-chief. At least he may be assigned to that class which occupies a dubious frontier space between the rational and the insane.

If however the suggestions and sketches which I had endeavoured to exhibit as interesting and practicable, were attempted to be turned into vanity and "thin air" by the enunciation of this epithet, I would say, Pray now what do you mean by *romantic?* Have you, as you pronounce it, a very precise conception in your mind, which you can give in some other words, and then distinctly fix the charge? Or is this a word,

which, because it is often used in some such way as you now use it, may be left to tell its own meaning better than the speaker knows how to explain it? Or perhaps you mean that the ideas which I am expressing, associate in your mind with the fantastic images of romance, and that you cannot help thinking of enchanted castles, encounters with giants, solemn exorcisms, fortunate surprises, knights and wizards, dragons and griffins. You cannot exactly distinguish what the absurdity in my notions *is* but you fancy what it is *like*. You therefore condemn it, not by giving a definition, but by applying an epithet which assigns it to a class of things already condemned; for evidently the epithet should signify a resemblance to what we have condemned in the works of romance." Well then, take advantage of this resemblance, to bring your censure into a discriminative form. Explain with precision the chief points in which the absurdity of the works of romance has consisted, and then shew how the same distinctions characterize my notions or schemes. I will then renounce at once all my visionary follies, and be henceforward at least a very sober, if I cannot be a very rational man.

The great general distinction of those works has been the ascendency of imagination over judgment. And the description is correct as applied to the books, even if the writers of them had the best judgments in the world. If they chose, for their amusement, to lay a sound judgment awhile to rest, to stimulate their imagination to the wildest extravagances, and to write

them as they went on, the book would be nearly the same thing as if produced by a mind in which sound judgment had no place; it would be a *practical* ascendency of imagination, though not a necessary one. It was a different case, if a writer kept his judgment active, amidst these extravagances, for the very purpose of managing and directing them to some particular end, of satire or sober truth. But however, the romances of the ages of chivalry and the preceding times, were not composed in either of these states of the understanding. They were the productions neither of men who, possessing a strong judgment, chose formally to forego its exercise, in order to riot awhile in scenes of extravagant fancy, only keeping that judgment so far awake as to retain a continual consciousness in what degree they *were* extravagant; nor of men who were dexterously aiming at some intellectual or moral purpose. It is evident that their minds were under the real and permanent ascendency of imagination; and though they must have perceived that the operations of this faculty went to an excess in some of its wildest flights, yet it might reach a very great degree of extravagance without their being conscious of any excess at all. They did not perceive any want of consistency and probability in descriptions of objects, and narrations of actions, which a sound judgment would have convicted of monstrous absurdity. This great mental defect was also a distinction of the age in which they wrote. The understanding of Cervantes clearly saw the whole extent of this mental defect in the writers and the age, and re-

presented and corrected it by exhiting a specimen of a still more ludicrous and excessive prevalence of imagination over judgment. Serious romance was however in some form to be retained, and has been the work of many writers who were not altogether beguiled out of their understanding by their fancy. Yet still it has retained a measure of its ancient character; it would not *be* romance without such a degree of the marvellous as a cool judgment with difficulty admits to be probable or possible. The ascendency of imagination over judgment therefore, as being the great distinction of these works, must be, in human character also, the foundation of whatever is justly denominated romantic. A man possessing so strong a judgment, and so subordinate a fancy, as Dean Swift, would hardly have been made romantic, if he had lived amidst the pomp and adventures of chivalry, and studied all the books in Don Quixote's library.

The absence of that clear understanding which precludes every romantic tendency, by discerning things as they really are, does not necessarily produce a romantic character, since imagination may be deficient also; and this double and equal deficiency produces mere dulness. But it is obvious that a weak judgment may be accompanied by a great force of that faculty which can powerfully assert itself even in childhood, in dreams, and in the state of insanity.

An understanding which might not, if combined with less imagination, exactly deserve the imputation of debility, may yet be practically reduced to this state by a disproportionate ima-

gination, which continually invades its sphere, and takes every thing out of its hands. And then the case is made worse by the unfortunate circumstance, that the exercise of the faculty which should be repressed, is incomparably more easy and delightful, than of that which should be promoted. Indeed the term *exercise* is hardly applicable to the activity of a faculty, which can be active without effort, which is so far from needing to be stimulated to its works of magic, that it often scorns the most serious injunctions to forbear. It is not exercise, but indulgence ; and even minds possessing much of the power of understanding, may be disposed to undergo but little of the labour of it, when amidst the ease of deepest indolence they can revel in the activity of a more animating employment. Imagination may be indulged till it usurp an entire ascendency over the mind, and then every subject presented to that mind will excite imagination, instead of understanding, to work ; imagination will throw its colours where the intellectual faculty ought to draw its lines; imagination will accumulate metaphors where reason ought to deduce arguments ; images will take the place of thoughts, and scenes of disquisitions. The whole mind may become at length something like a hemisphere of cloud-scenery, filled with an ever moving train of changing melting forms, of every colour, mingled with rainbows, meteors, and an occasional gleam of pure sun-light, all vanishing away, the mental like this natural imagery, when its hour is up, without leaving any thing behind but the wish to recover the vision. And

yet, the while, this series of visions, may be mistaken for operations of thought, and each cloudy image be admitted in the place of a proposition or a reason; or it may even be mistaken for something sublimer than thinking. The influence of this habit of dwelling on the beautiful fallacious forms of imagination, will accompany the mind into the most serious speculations, or rather musings, on the real world, and what is to be done in it, and expected; just as the image, which the eye acquires from looking at any dazling object, still apppears before it wherever it turns. The vulgar materials that constitute the actual economy of the world, will rise up to its sight in fictitious forms, which it cannot disenchant into plain reality, nor even suspect to be deceptive. It cannot go about with sober rational inspection, and ascertain the nature and value of all things around it. Indeed such a mind is not disposed to examine, with any careful minuteness, the real condition of things. It is content with ignorance, because environed with something more delicious than such knowledge, in the Paradise which imagination creates. In that Paradise it walks delighted, till some imperious circumstance of real life call it thence, and it gladly escapes thither again when the avocation is past. There, every thing is beautiful and noble as could be desired to form the residence of an angel. If a tenth part of the felicities that have been enjoyed, the great actions that have been performed, the beneficent institutions that have been established, and the beautiful objects that have been seen, in that happy region, could have

been imported into this terrestrial place—what a delightful thing, my dear friend, it would have been to awake each morning to see such a world once more.

It is not strange that a faculty, of which the exercise is so easy and bewitching, and the scope infinite, should obtain a predominance over understanding, especially in young persons, and in those who have been brought up, like Rasselas and his companions, in a state of seclusion from the sight and experience of the world. Indeed a considerable vigour of imagination, though it be at the expense of a frequent predominance over juvenile understanding, seems even necessary, in early life, to cause a generous expansion of the passions by giving the most lively aspect to the objects by which they ought to be interested. It may also contribute to prepare the mind for the exercise of that faith which converses with unseen objects, but converses with them through the medium of those ideal forms in which imagination presents them, and in which only a strong imagination can present them impressively*. And I should deem it the indication of a character not destined to excel in the liberal, the energetic, or the devout qualities, if I observed in the youthful age a close confine-

* The Divine Being is the only one of these objects which a christian would wish it possible to contemplate without the aid of imagination; and every reflective man has felt how difficult it is to apprehend even this object without the intervention of an image. In thinking of the transactions and personages of history, the final events of time foretold by prophecy, the state of good men in another world, the superior ranks of intelligent agents, &c. he has often had occasion to wish his imagination more vivid.

ment of thought to bare truth and minute accuracy, with an entire aversion to the splendours and occasional amplifications and excursions of fancy. This opinion is warranted by instances of persons so distinguished in youth, who have become subsequently very sensible indeed, but dry, cold, precise, devoted to detail, and incapable of being carried away one moment by any inspiration of the beautiful or the sublime. They seem to have only the bare intellectual stamina of the human mind, without the addition of what is to give it life and sentiment. They give one an impression similar to that made by the leafless trees which you remember our observing in winter, admirable for the distinct exhibition of their branches and minute ramifications so clearly defined on the sky, but destitute of all the green soft luxury of foliage which is requisite to make a perfect tree. And even the affections existing in such minds seem to have a bleak abode, somewhat like those bare deserted nests which you have often seen in such trees.

If indeed the signs of this exclusive understanding indicated also such an extraordinary degree of it, as to promise a very great mathematical or metaphysical genius, one would perhaps be content to forego some of the faculties and qualities which form a complete mind, for the sake of this pre-eminence of one of its distinctions; even though the person were to be so defective in sentiment and fancy, that, like a gentleman eminent in science at the present time, he could read through a most animated epic poem, and on being asked what he thought of it, grave-

ly reply, "What does it prove?" But the want of imagination is never an evidence, and perhaps but rarely a concomitant, of superior understanding.

Imagination may be allowed the ascendency in early youth; the case should always be reversed in mature life; and if it is not, a man should consider his mind as either unfortunately constructed, or unwisely disciplined. The latter indeed is probably true in every such instance.

LETTER II.

THE ascendency of imagination operates in various modes; I will endeavour to distinguish those which may justly be called romantic.

The extravagance of imagination in romance has very much consisted in the display of a destiny and course of life totally unlike the common condition of mankind. And you may have observed in living individuals, that one of the effects sometimes produced by the predominance of this faculty is, a persuasion in a person's own mind that he is born to some peculiar and extraordinary destiny, while yet there are no extraordinary indications in the person or his circumstances. There was something rational in the early presentiment which some distinguished men have entertained of their future career. When a celebrated general of the present times

exclaimed, after performing the common military exercise in a company of juvenile volunteers, "I shall be a commander in chief," a sagacious observer of the signs of yet undeveloped powers, might have thought it indeed a rather sanguine, but probably would have not pronounced it an absurd anticipation. An elder and intelligent associate of Milton's youth might without much difficulty have believed himself listening to an oracle, when so powerful a genius avowed to him, that he regarded himself as destined to produce a work which should distinguish the nation and the age. The opening of uncommon faculties may be sometimes attended with these anticipations, and may be allowed to express them, perhaps even, as a stimulus, encouraged to indulge them. But in most instances these magnificent presumptions form, in the observer's eye, a ludicrous contrast with the situation and powers of the person that entertains them. And in the event, how few such anticipations have proved themselves to have been the genuine promptings of an extraordinary mind!

The visionary expectation of a peculiar destiny is not confined however to prospects which imply uncommon talent; it is often the flattering self-assurance simply of a life of singular felicity. The captive of fancy fondly imagines his prospect of life as a delicious vale, from each side of which every stream of pleasure is to flow down to his feet; and while it cannot but be seen that innumerable evils do harass other human beings, some immortal spell is to protect him against them all. He takes no deliberate account of

what is inevitable in the lot of humanity, of the sober probabilities of his own situation, or of those principles in the constitution of his mind which are perhaps unfavourable to happiness.

If this excessive imagination is combined with tendencies to affection, it makes a person *sentimentally* romantic. With a great, and what might, in a better endowed mind, be a just contempt of the ordinary style of attachments, both in friendship and love, he indulges a most assured confidence that his peculiar lot is to realize all the wonders of generous, virtuous, noble, unalienable friendship, and of enraptured, uninterrupted, and unextinguishable love, that fiction ever talked in her dreams; while perhaps a shrewd indifferent observer can see nothing in the nativity or character of the man, or in the qualities of the human creatures that he adores, or in the principles on which his devotion is founded, to promise an elevation or permanence of felicity beyond the destiny of common mortals.

If a passion for variety and novelty accompanies this extravagant imagination, it will exclude from its bold sketches of future life every thing like confined regularity, and common plodding occupations. It will suggest that *I* was born for an adventurer, whose story will one day amaze the world. Perhaps I am to be an universal traveller; and there is not on the globe a grand city, or ruin, or volcano, or cataract, but I must see it. Debility of constitution, deficiency of means, innumerable perils, unknown languages, oppressive toils, and the shortness of life, are very possibly all left out of the account.

If there is in the disposition a love of what is called glory, and an almost religious admiration of those capacious and intrepid spirits one of which has often decided in one perilous day the destiny of armies and of empires, a predominant imagination may be led to revel amidst the splendours of military exploit, and to flatter the man that he too is to be a hero, a great general.

When a mind under this influence recurs to precedents as a foundation and a warrant of its expectations, they are never the usual, but always the extraordinary examples, that are contemplated. An observer of the ordinary instances of friendship is perhaps heard to assert, that the sentiment is sufficiently languid in general to admit of an entire self-interest, of absence without pain, and of final indifference.—Well, so let it be; Damon and Pythias were friends of a different sort, and *our* friendship is to be like theirs. Or if the subject of musing and hope is the union in which love commonly results, it may be true and obvious enough, that the generality of instances would not seem to tell of more than a mediocrity of happiness in this relation; but a visionary person does not live within the same world with these examples. The few instances which have been recorded of tender and never-dying enthusiasm, together with the numerous ones which romance and poetry have created, form the class to which he belongs and from whose enchanting history, excepting their misfortunes, he reasons to his own future experience. So too the man, whose fancy anticipates political or martial achievment, allows his

thoughts to revert continually to those names which a rare conjunction of talents and circumstances has elevated into fame; forgetting that many thousands, even of men of great ability, have died in obscurity, for want of situations in which to display themselves; and never suspecting that himself perhaps has not talents competent to any thing great, if some extraordinary event were just now to place him in the most opportune concurrence of circumstances. That there has been one very signal man to a million, gives a stronger probability that he shall be a signal man, than that there have been a million to one signal man, infers a probability of his remaining one of the multitude.

You will generally observe, that persons thus self-appointed, in either sex, to be exceptions to the usual lot of humanity, endeavour at a kind of consistency of character, by a great aversion to the common modes of action and language, and an habitual affectation of something extraordinary. They will perhaps disdain regular hours, usual dresses, and common forms of transacting business; this you are to regard as the impulse of a spirit whose high vocation requires it to renounce all signs of relation to vulgar minds.

The epithet romantic then may be justly applied to those presumptions (if entertained after the childish or very youthful age) of a peculiarly happy or important destiny in life, which are not clearly founded on certain palpable distinctions of character or situation, or which greatly exceed the sober prognostics afforded by those distinctions.—It should be observed here that *wishes*

merely do not costitute a character romantic.—A person may sometimes let his mind wander into vain wishes for all the fine and strange things on earth, and yet be far too sober to expect any of them. In this case however he will often check and reproach himself for the folly of entertaining the wish.

The absurdity of such anticipations consists simply in the improbability of their being realized, and not in their objects being uncongenial with the human mind; but another effect of the predominance of imagination may be a disposition to form schemes or indulge expectations essentially incongruous with the nature of man. Perhaps however you will say, What is this nature? Is it not a mere passive thing, variable almost to infinity, according to climate, to institutions, and to the different ages of time? Even taking it in a civilized state, what relation is there between such a form of human nature as that displayed at Sparta, and, for instance, the modern Society of Friends, or the Moravian Fraternity? And how can we ascertain what is congenial with it or not, unless itself were first ascertained? Allow me to say, that I speak of human nature in its most general principles only, as social, self-interested, inclined to the wrong, slow to improve, passing through several states of capacity and feeling in the successive periods of life, and the few other such permanent distinctions. Any of these distinctions may vanish from the sight of a visionary mind, while forming, for itself or for others, such schemes as could have sprung only from an imagination become way-

ward through its excess of power. I remember, for example, a person, very young indeed, who was so enchanted with the stories of Gregory Lopez, and one or two more pious hermits, as almost to form the resolution to betake himself to some wilderness and live as Gregory did. At any time, the very word *hermit* was enough to transport him, like the witch's broomstick, to the solitary hut, which was delightfully surrounded by shady solemn groves, mossy rocks, crystal streams, and gardens of radishes. While this fancy lasted, he forgot the most obvious of all facts, that man is not made for habitual solitude, nor can endure it without misery, except when turned into a superstitious ascetic*.

Contrary to human nature, is the proper description of those theories of education, and those flatteries of parental hope, which presume that young people in general may be matured to eminent wisdom, and adorned with the universality of noble attainments, by the period at which in fact the intellectual faculty is but beginning to operate with any thing like clearness and force. Because some individuals, remarkable exceptions to the natural character of youth, have almost in their childhood advanced beyond the youthful giddiness, and debility of reason, and have displayed, at the age of perhaps twenty-one, a wonderful assemblage of all the strong

* Lopez indeed was often visited by pious persons who sought his instructions; this was a great alleviation: but my hermit was fond of the idea of an uninhabited island, or of a wilderness so deep that these good people would not have been able to come at him, without a more formidable pilgrimage than was ever yet made for the sake of obtaining instruction.

and all the graceful endowments, it therefore only needs a proper system of education to make other young people (at least those of *my* family, the parent thinks) be no longer what nature has always made youth to be. Let this be adopted, and we shall see multitudes at that age possessing the judgment of sages, or the diversified acquirements and graces of all-accomplished gentlemen and ladies. And what, pray, are the beings which are to become, by the discipline of eight or ten years, such finished examples of various excellence? Not, surely, these boys here, that love nothing so much as tops, marbles, and petty mischief—and those girls, that have yet attained but few ideas beyond the dressing of dolls? Yes, even these!

The same charge, of being unadapted to man, seems applicable to the speculations of those philosophers and philanthropists, who have eloquently displayed the happiness, and asserted the practicability, of an equality of property and modes of life throughout society. Those who really anticipated or projected the practical trial of the system, must have forgotten on what plannet those apartments were built, or those arbours were growing, in which they were contemplating such visions. For in these visions they beheld the ambition of one part of the inhabitants, the craft or audacity of another, the avarice of another, the stupidity or indolence of another, and the selfishness of almost all, as mere adventitious faults, superinduced on the character of the species, and instantly flying off at the approach of better institutions, which shall

prove, to the confusion of all the calumniators of human nature, that nothing is so congenial to it as moderation and disinterestedness. However, it is but just to acknowledge, that most of them have admitted the necessity of such a grand transformation as to make man another being, previously to the adoption of the system. This is all very well: when the proper race of *men* shall came from Utopia, the system and polity may very properly come along with them; or these sketches of it, prepared for them by *us*, may be carefully preserved here, in volumes more precious than those of the Sibyls, against their arrival. Till then, the sober observers of the human character will read these beautiful theories as romances, adapted to excite sarcastic ridicule in their splenetic hours, when they are disgusted with human nature, and to produce deep melancholy in their benevolent ones, when they pity it.

It hardly needs to be said, that the character of the age of chivalry may be cited as an illustration of the same kind. One of its most prominent distinctions was, an immense congruity with the simplest principles of human nature. For instance, in the concern of love: a generous young man became attached to an interesting young woman—interesting, that is to say, as he believed, from having once seen her; for probably he never heard her speak. His heart would naturally prompt him to seek access to the object whose society, it told him, would make him happy; and if in a great measure debarred from that society, he would surrender himself to the

melting mood of the passion, in the musings of pensive retirement. But this was not the way. He must abandon for successive years her society and vicinity, and every soft indulgence of feeling, and rush boldly into all sorts of hardships and perils, deeming no misfortune so great as not to find constant occasions of hazarding his life among the roughest foes, or, if he could find or fancy them, the strangest monsters; and all this, not as the alleviation of despair, but as the courtship of hope. And when he was at length betrayed to flatter himself that such a probation, through every kind of patience and danger, might entitle him to throw his trophies and himself at her imperial feet, it was very possible she might be affronted that he had presumed to be still alive. It is unnecessary to refer to the other parts of the institution of chivalry, the whole system of which would seem more adapted to any race of beings exhibited in the Arabian Nights, or to any still wilder creation of fancy, than to a community of creatures appointed to live by cultivating the soil, anxious to avoid pain and trouble, seeking the reciprocation of affection on the easiest terms, and nearest to happiness in regular pursuits and quiet domestic life.

One cannot help reflecting here, how amazingly accommodating this human nature has been to all institutions but wise and good ones; insomuch that an order of life and manners, formed in the wildest deviation from all plain sense and native instinct, could be practically adopted by as many as had rank and courage enough, and

dared and envied by all the rest of mankind. Still, the genuine tendencies of nature have survived the strange but transient modifications of time, and remain the same after the age of chivalry is gone far toward that oblivion, to which you will not fail to wish that many other institutions might speedily follow it. Forgive the prolixity of these illustrations intended to shew, that schemes and speculations respecting the interests either of an individual or of society, which are inconsistent with the natural constitution of man, may, except where it should be reasonable to expect some supernatural intervention, be denominated romantic.

The tendency to this species of romance may be caused, or very greatly augmented, by an exclusive taste for what is *grand*, a disease to which some few minds are subject. They have no pleasure in contemplating the system of things as the Creator has ordered it, a combination of great and little, in which the great is much more dependent on the little, than the little on the great. They cut out the grand objects, to dispose them into a world of their own. All the images in their intellectual scene must be colossal and mountainous. They are constantly seeking what is animated into heroics, what is expanded into immensity, what is elevated above the stars. But for great empires, great battles, great enterprises, great convulsions, great geniuses, great temples, great rivers, there would be nothing worth naming in this part of the creation*. All that belongs to connexion, grada-

* Just as, to employ a humble comparison, a votary of fashion, after visiting a crowded public place which happened at that

tion, harmony, regularity, and utility, is thrown out of sight behind these forms of vastness. The influence of this exclusive taste will reach into the system of projects and expectations. The man will wish to summon the world to throw aside its tame accustomed pursuits, and adopt at once more magnificent views and objects, and will be indignant at mankind that they cannot or will not be sublime. Impatient of little means and slow processes, he will wish for violent transitions and entirely new institutions. He will perhaps determine to set men the example of performing something great, in some ill-judged sanguine project in which he will fail; and, after being ridiculed by society, both for the scheme and its castastrophe, may probably abandon all the activities of life, and become a misanthrope the rest of his days.

LETTER III.

One of the most obvious distinctions of the works of romance is, an utter violation of all the relations between ends and means. Sometimes such ends are proposed as seem quite dissevered from means, inasmuch as there are scarcely any supposable means on earth to accomplish them:

time not to be graced by the presence of many people of consequence, tells you, with an affected tone, "There was not a creature there."

but no matter; if we cannot ride we must swim, if we cannot swim we must fly: the object is effected by a mere poetical omnipotence that wills it. And very often practicable objects are attained by means the most fantastic, improbable, or inadequate; so that there is scarcely any resemblance between the method in which they are accomplished by the dexterity of fiction, and that in which the same things must be attempted in the actual economy of the world. Now, when you see this absurdity of imagination prevailing in the calculations of real life, you may justly apply the epithet romantic.

Indeed a strong and habitually indulged imagination may be so absorbed in the end, if it is not a concern of absolute immediate urgency, as for a while quite to forget the process of attainment. It has incantations to dissolve the rigid laws of time and distance, and place a man in something so like the presence of his object, that he seems half to possess it; and it is hard while occupying the verge of paradise, to be flung far back in order to find or make a path to it, with the slow and toilsome steps of reality. In the luxury of promising himself that what he wishes will by some means take place at some time, he forgets that he is advancing no nearer to it—except on the wise and patient calculation that he must, by the simple movement of growing older, be coming somewhat nearer to every event that is yet to happen to him. He is like a traveller, who, amidst his indolent musings in some soft bower, where he sat down to be shaded a little while from the rays of the noon, falls

asleep, and dreams he is in the midst of all the endearments of home, insensible that there are many hills and dales for him yet to traverse. But the traveller will awake; so too will the man of fancy, and if he has the smallest capacity of just reflection, he will regret to have wasted in reveries the time which ought to have been devoted to practical exertions.

But even though reminded of the necessity of intervening means, the man of imagination will often be tempted to violate their relation with ends, by permitting himself to dwell on those happy *casualties* which the prolific sorcery of his mind will promptly figure to him as the very things, if they would but occur, to accomplish his wishes at once, without the toil of a sober process. If they would occur—and things as strange *might* happen: he reads in the newspapers that an estate of twenty thousand pounds per annum was lately adjudged to a man who was working on the road. He has even heard of people dreaming that in such a place something valuable was concealed; and that, on searching or digging that place, they found an old earthen pot, full of gold and silver pieces of the times of good king Charles the Martyr. Mr. B. was travelling by the mail-coach, in which he met with a most interesting young lady, whom he had never seen before; they were mutually delighted, and were married in a few weeks. Mr. C. a man of great merit in obscurity, was walking across a field when Lord D., in chase of a fox, leaped over the hedge, and fell off his horse into a ditch. Mr. C. with the utmost alacrity and

kind solicitude helped his lordship out of the ditch, and recovered for him his escaped horse. The consequence was inevitable; his lordship, superior to the pride of being mortified to have been seen in a condition so unlucky for giving the impression of nobility, commenced a friendship with Mr. C. and introduced him into honourable society and the road to fortune. A very ancient maiden laidy of large fortune happening to be embarrassed in a crowd, a young clergyman offered her his arm, and politely attended her home; his attention so captivated her, that she bequeathed to him, soon after, the whole estate, though she had many poor relations.

That class of fictitious works called *novels*, though much more like real life than the romances which preceded them, (and which are now, with some alterations partly come into vogue again,) is yet full of these lucky incidents and adventures, which are introduced as the chief means toward the ultimate success. A young man without fortune, for instance, is precluded from making his addresses to a young female in a superior situation, whom he believes not indifferent to him, until he can approach her with such worldly advantages as it might not be imprudent or degrading for her to accept. Now how is this to be accomplished?—Why, I suppose, by the exertion of his talents in some fair and practicable department; and perhaps the lady besides will generously abdicate for his sake some of the trappings and luxuries of rank. You really suppose this is the plan? I am sorry you have so much less genius than a novel-writer.

This young man has an uncle, who has been absent a long time, nobody knew where, except the young man's lucky stars. During his absence, the old uncle has gained a large fortune, with which he returns to his native land, at a time most opportune for every one, but a highwayman, who attacks him in a road through a wood, but is frightened away by the young hero, who happens to come there at the instant, to rescue and recognise his uncle, and to be in return recognised and made the heir to as many thousands as the lady or her family could wish. Must not the reader think it very *likely* that *he* too has some old uncle, or acquaintance at least, returning with a ship-load of wealth from the East-Indies; and very *desirable* that the highwayman should make one such attempt more; and very *certain* that in that case he shall be there in the nick of time to catch all that fortune sends? One's indignation is excited at the immoral tendency of such lessons to young readers, who are thus taught to regard all sober regular plans for compassing an object with disgust or despondency, and to muse on improbabilities till they become foolish enough to expect them and to be melancholy when they find they may expect them in vain. It is unpardonable that these pretended instructors by example should thus explode the calculations and exertions of manly resolution, destroy the connexion between ends and means, and make the rewards of virtue so depend on chance, that if the reader does not either regard the whole fable with contempt, or promise himself he shall receive the favours of fortune in some similar way, he

must close the book with the conviction that he may hang or drown himself as soon as he pleases; that is to say, unless he has learnt from some other source a better morality and religion than these books will ever teach him.

Another deception in respect of means, is the facility with which fancy passes along the train of them, and reckons to their ultimate effect at a glance, without resting at the successive stages, and considering the labours and hazards of the protracted process from each point to the next. If a given number of years are allowed requisite for the accomplishment of an object, the romantic mind vaults from one last day of December to another, and seizes at once the whole product of all the intermediate days, without condescending to recollect that the sun never shone yet on three hundred and sixty-five days at once, and that they must be slowly told and laboured one by one. If a favourite plan is to be accomplished by means of a certain large amount of property, which is to be produced from what is at present a very small one, the calculations of a sanguine mind can change shillings into guineas, and guineas into hundreds of pounds, imcomparably faster than, in the actual experiment, these lazy shillings can be compelled to improve themselves into guineas, and the guineas into hundreds of pounds. You remember the noble calculation of Alnaschar on his basket of earthen ware, which was so soon to obtain him the Sultan's daughter.

Where imagination is not delusive enough to embody future casualties as effective means, it

may yet represent very inadequate ones as competent. In a well-balanced mind, no conception will grow into a favourite purpose, unaccompanied by a process of the understanding, deciding its practicability by an estimate of the means; in a mind under the influence of fancy, this is a subordinate after-task. By the time that this comes to be considered, the projector is too much enamoured of an end that is deemed to be great, to abandon it because the means are suspected to be little. But then they must cease to *appear* little; for there must be an apparent proportion between the means and the end. Well, trust the whole concern to this plastic faculty, and presently every insignificant particle of means, and every petty contrivance for their management, will swell into magnitude; pigmies and Lilliputians with their tiny arrows will soon grow up into giants wielding spears; and the diffident consciousness which was at first somewhat afraid to measure the plan against the object, will give place to a generous scorn of the timidity of doubting. The mind will most ingeniously place the apparatus between its eye and the object, and be delighted to find that the one looks as large as the other.

The consideration of the deluded calculations on the effect of insufficient means would lead to a wide variety of particulars; I will only touch slightly on a few. Various projects of a *benevolent* order would come under this charge. Did you ever listen to the discussion of plans for the civilization of barbarous nations without the intervention of conquest? I have with interest and

with despair*. That very many millions of the species should form only a brutal adjunct to civilized and enlightened man, is a melancholy thing, notwithstanding the whimsical attempts of some ingenious men to represent the state of wandering savages as preferable to every other condition of life; a state for which, no doubt, they would have been sincerely glad to abandon their fame, and indolence, and proud refinements. But where are the means to reclaim these wretched beings into the civilized family of man? A few examples indeed are found in history, of barbarous tribes being formed into well-ordered and considerably enlightened states by one man, who began the attempt without any power but that of persuasion. There are other instances, of the success obtained by a small combination of men employing the same means; as in the great undertaking of the Jesuits in South America. But have not these wonderful facts been far too few to be made a standard for the speculations of sober men? And have they not also come to us with too little explanation to illustrate any general principles? To me it appears extremely difficult to comprehend how the means recorded by historians to have been employed by some of the unarmed civilizers, could have produced so great an effect. In observing the half-civilized condition of a large part of the population of these more improved countries, and in reading what travellers describe of the state and dispositions of the various orders of

* I here place out of view that religion by which Omnipotence will at length transform the world.

savages, it would seem a presumption unwarranted by any thing we ever saw of the powers of the human mind, to suppose that any man, or any ten men now on earth, if landed and left on a savage coast, would be able to transform a multitude of stupid or ferocious tribes into a community of mild intelligence and regular industry. We are therefore led to believe, that the few unaccountable instances conspicuous in the history of the world, of the success of one or a few men in this work, must have been the result of such a combination of favourable circumstances, co-operating with their genius and perseverance, as no other man can hope to experience. Such events seem like Joshua's arresting the sun and moon, things that have been done, but can be done no more. Pray, which of you, I should say, could expect to imitate with success, or indeed would think it right if he could, the deception of Manco Capac, and awe a wild multitude into order by a commission from the sun? What would be your first expedient in the attempt to substitute that regularity and constraint which they hate, for that lawless liberty which they love? How could you reduce them to be conscious, or incite them to be proud, of those wants, for being subject to which they would regard you as their inferiors; wants of which, unless they could comprehend the refinement, they must necessarily despise the debility? By what magic are you to render visible and palpable any part of the world of science or of abstraction to beings who have hardly words to denominate even their sensations? And by what

concentrated force of all kinds of magic together, that Egypt or Chaldea ever pretended, are you to introduce humanity and refinement among such creatures as the Northern Indians, described by Mr. Hearne? If an animated young philanthropist still zealously maintained that it might be done, I should be amused to think how that warm imagination would be quelled, if he were obliged to make the practical trial. It is easy for him to be romantic while enlivened by the intercourse of cultivated society, while reading of the contrivances and the patience of ancient legislators, or while infected with the enthusiasm of poetry. He feels as if he could be the moral conqueror of a continent. He becomes a Hercules amidst imaginary labours; he traverses untired, while in his room, wide tracts of the wilderness; he surrounds himself with savage men, without either trembling or revolting at their aspects or fierce exclamations; he makes eloquent speeches to them, though he knows not a word of their language; they listen with the deepest attention, are convinced of the necessity of adopting new habits of life, and speedily soften into humanity, and brighten into wisdom. But he would become sober enough, if compelled to travel a thousand miles through the desert, or over the snow, with some of these subjects of his lectures and legislation; to accompany them in a hunting excursion; to choose in a stormy night between exposure in the open air and the smoke and grossness of their cabins; to observe the intellectual faculty narrowed almost to a point, limited to a scanty number of the meanest class

of ideas; to find by repeated experiments that *his* kind of ideas could neither reach their understanding nor excite their curiosity; to see the ravenous appetite of wolves succeeded for a season by a stupidity insensible even to the few interests which kindle the utmost ardour of a savage; to witness loathsome habits occasionally diversified by abominable ceremonies; or to be for once the spectator of some of the circumstances which accompany the wars of savages.

But there are many more familiar illustrations of the extravagant estimate of means. One is, the expectation of far too much from mere direct instruction. This is indeed so general, that it will hardly be termed romantic, except in the most excessive instances. Observe it, however, a moment in the concern of education. Nothing seems more evident than the influence of external circumstances, distinct from the regular discipline of the parent or tutor, in forming the character of youth. And nothing seems more evident than that direct instruction, though an useful ally to the influence of these circumstances when they are auspicious, is a feeble counteractor if they are malignant. And yet this mere instruction is enough, in the account of thousands of parents, to lead the youth to wisdom and happiness; even that very youth whom the united influence of almost all things else which he is exposed to see, and hear, and participate, is drawing with the unrelaxing grasp of a fiend to destruction.

A too sanguine opinion of the efficacy of instruction, has sometimes been entertained by

those who teach from the pulpit. Till the dispensations of a better age shall be opened on the world, the measure of effect which may reasonably be expected from preaching, is to be determined by a view of the visible effects which are actually produced on the congregations from week to week; and this view is far from flattering. One might appeal to preachers in general—What striking improvements are apparent in your societies? When you inculcate charity on the Sunday, do the misers in your congregations liberally open their chests and purses to the distressed on Monday? Might I not ask as well, whether the rocks and trees really *did* move at the voice of Orpheus? After you have unveiled even the scenes of eternity to the gay and frivolous, do you find in more than some rare instances a dignified seriousness take place of their follies? What is the effect, on the elegant splendid professors of christianity, of your inculcation of that solemn interdiction of their habits, Be not conformed to this world? Yet, notwithstanding this melancholy state of facts, some preachers, from the persuasion of a mysterious apostolic sacredness in the office, or from a vain estimate of their personal talents, or from mistaking the applause with which the preacher has been flattered, for the proof of a salutary effect on the minds of the hearers, and some from a much worthier cause, the affecting influence of sacred truth on their own minds, have been inclined to anticipate immense effects from their public ministrations.—Melancthon was a romantic youth when he began to preach. He expected that all must be inevita-

bly and immediately persuaded, when they should hear what he had to tell them. But he soon discovered, as he said, that old Adam was too hard for young Melancthon. In addition to the grand fact of the depravity of the human heart, there are so many causes operating injuriously through the week on the characters of those who form a congregation, that a thoughtful man often feels a melancholy emotion amidst his religious addresses, from the reflection that he is making a feeble effort against a powerful evil, a single effort against a combination of evils, a temporary and transient effort against evils of continual operation, and a purely intellectual effort against evils many of which act on the senses. When the preacher considers the effect naturally resulting from the sight of so many bad examples, the communications of so many injurious acquaintances, the hearing and talking of what would be, if written, so many volumes of vanity and nonsense, the predominance of fashionable dissipation in one class, and of vulgarity in another; he must indeed imagine himself endowed with the power of a super-human eloquence, if the instructions, expressed in an hour or two on the sabbath, and soon forgotten, as he might know, by most of his hearers, are to leave something in the mind, which shall be through the week the efficacious repellent to the contact and contamination of all these forces of mischief. But how soon he would cease to imagine such a power in his exhortations, if the greater number of his hearers could sincerely and accurately tell him, toward the end of the week, in what degree these

admonitions had affected and governed them, in opposition to their corrupt tendencies and their temptations. What would be, in the five or six days, the number of the moments and the instances in which these instructions would be proved to have been effectual, compared with the whole number of moments and circumstances to which they were justly applicable? How often, while hearing such a week's detail of the lives of a considerable proportion of a congregation, a man would have occasion to say, By whose instructions were these persons influenced *then*, in that neglect of devout exercises, that excess of levity, that waste of time, that avowed contempt of religion, that language of profaneness and imprecation, those contrivances of selfishness, those paroxysms of passion, that study of sensuality, or that general and obdurate depravity?

But the preacher whom I deem too sanguine, may tell me, that it is not by means of any force which *he* can throw into his religious instructions, that he expects them to be efficacious, but that he believes a *divine* energy will accompany what is undoubtedly a message from heaven. I am pleased with the piety, and the sound judgment, (as I esteem it,) with which he expects the conversion of careless or hardened men from nothing *less* than the operation of a power strictly divine. But I would remind him, that the probability, at any given season, that such a power will intervene, must be in proportion to the frequency or infrequency with which its interven-

tion is actually manifested in the general course of experience. In other words, it is in proportion to the number of happy transformations of character which we see taking place under the efficacy of religious truth.

Reformers in general are very apt to over-rate the power of the means by which their theories are to be realized. They are for ever introducing the story of Archimedes, who was to have moved the world if he could have found any second place on which to plant his engines; and imagination discloses to moral and political projectors a cloud-built and truly extramundane position, which they deem to be exactly such a convenience in their department, as the mathematician, whose converse with demonstrations had saved *part* of his reason from being run away with by his fancy, confessed to be a desideratum in his. This terra firma is called the Omnipotence of Truth.

It is presumed, that truth must at length, by the force of indefatigable inquiry, become generally victorious, and that all vice, being the result of a mistaken judgment of the nature or the means of happiness, must therefore accompany the exit of error. Of course, it is presumed of the present times also, or of those immediately approaching, that in every society and every mind where truth is clearly admitted, the reforms which it dictates must substantially follow. I have the most confident faith that the empire of truth, advancing under a far mightier agency than mere philosophic inquiry, is appointed to irradiate the latter ages of a dark and

troubled world; and, on the strength of prophetic intimations, I anticipate its coming sooner, by at least a thousand centuries, than a disciple of that philosophy which rejects revelation, as the first proud step toward the improvement of the world, is warranted, by a view of the past and present state of mankind, to predict. The assurance from the same athority is the foundation for believing, that when that sacred empire shall overspread the world, the virtues of character will correspond to the illuminations of understanding. But in the present state of the moral system, our expectations of the effect of truth on the far greater number of the persons who shall admit its convictions, have no right to exceed those rules of probability which are taught by facts. It would be gratifying no doubt to believe, that the several powers in the human constitution are so combined, that to gain the judgment would be to secure the whole man. And if all history, and all memory of our observation and experience, could be merged in Lethe, it might be believed, perhaps a few hours. How could an attentive observer believe it longer? Is it not obvious that very many persons, with a most absolute conviction, by their own ingenious avowal, that one certain course of action is virtue and happiness, and another, vice and misery, do yet habitually choose the latter? It is not improbable that several millions of human beings are at this very hour acting in violation of the laws of goodness, while those laws are clearly admitted, not only as impositions of moral authority, but as the vital principles of their own

true self-interest*. And do not even the best men confess a fierce discord between the tendencies of their nature, and the dictates of that truth which they revere. Do they not say with St. Paul, "That which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that I do; to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not; the good that I would, that I do not, and the evil which I would not, that I do?" Does not every serious self-observer recollect instances, in which a temptation, exactly addressed to his passions or his habits, has prevailed in spite of the sternest interdict of his judgment, pronounced at the very crisis? Perhaps the most awful sanctions by which the judgment can ever enforce its authority, were distinctly brought to his view at the same moment with its convictions. In the subsequent hour he had to reflect, that the ideas of God, of a future account, of a world of retribution, could not prevent him from violating

* The criminal himself has the clearest consciousness that he violates the dictates of his judgment. How trifling is the subtilty which affects to shew that he does *not* violate them, by alleging, that every act of choice must be preceded by a determination of the judgment, and that therefore in choosing an evil, a man does at the time judge it to be on some account preferable, though he may know it to be wrong. It is not to be denied that the choice does imply such a conclusion of the judgment. But this conclusion is made according to a narrow and subordinate scale of estimating good and evil, while the mind is conscious that, judging according to a larger scale, the opposite conclusion is true. It judges a thing better for immediate pleasure, which it knows to be worse for ultimate advantage. The criminal therefore may be correctly said to act *according* to his judgment, in choosing it for present pleasure. But since it is the great office of the judgment to decide what is wisest and best *on the whole* the man may truly be said to act *against* his judgment, who acts in opposition to the conclusions which it forms on this greater scale.

his conscience. That he did not dwell deliberately on these ideas, is nothing against my argument. It is in the nature of the passions not to permit the mind to fix strongly on those considerations which oppose and condemn them. But what greater power than this, is requisite for their fatal triumph? If the passions *can* thus prevent the mind from strongly fixing on the most awful considerations when distinctly presented, they can destroy the efficacy of that truth which presents them. Truth can do no more than discriminate the good from the evil before us, and declare the consequences of our choice. When this is inefficacious, its power has failed. And no fact can be more evident than that its power often thus fails. I should compassionate the self-complacency of the man who was not conscious he had to deplore many violations of his own clearest convictions. And in trying the efficacy of truth on others, it would be found in numberless instances, that to have informed and convinced a man, may be but little toward emancipating him from the habits which he sincerely acknowledges to be wrong. There is then no such inviolable connexion as some men have supposed between the admission of truth, and consequent action. And therefore however great is the value of truth, the expectations that presume its omnipotence, without extraordinary intervention, are romantic delusion.

You will observe that in this case of trying the efficacy of the truth on others, I have supposed the great previous difficulty of presenting it to

the understanding so luminously as to impress irresistible conviction, to be already overcome; though the experimental reformer will find this introductory work such an arduous undertaking, that he will be continually tempted to abandon it as a hopeless one.

LETTER IV.

As far as the gloomy estimate of means and of plans for the amendment of mankind may appear to involve the human administration of the religion of Christ, I am anxious not to seem to fail in justice to that religion by which I entirely believe, and rejoice to believe, that every improvement of a sublime order yet awaiting our race must be effected. And I trust I do not fail, since I keep in my mind a most clear distinction between Christianity itself as a divine thing, and the administration of it, by a system of merely human powers and means. These means are indeed of divine appointment, and to a certain extent are accompanied by a special divine agency. But this agency appears to accompany them only so far as they are successful, and stopping where the effect stops, leaves them to accomplish, if they can, what remains. And oh, what remains? If the general transformation of mankind into such persons as could be justly deemed true disciples of Christ, were regarded as the

object of his religion, how mysteriously small a part of that object has this divine agency ever yet been exerted to accomplish! And then, the awful and immense remainder evinces the inexpressible imbecility of the means, when left to be applied as a mere human administration. I need not illustrate its incompetency by citing the vast majority, the numerous millions, of Christendom, nor the millions of even our own country, on whom this religion has no direct influence. I need not observe how many of these have heard or read the evangelic declaration ten thousand times, nor with what perfect insensibility vast numbers can receive its most luminous ideas, and most cogent enforcements, which are but like arrows meeting the shield of Ajax. Probably each religious teacher can recollect, besides his general experience, very particular instances, in which he has set himself to exert the utmost force of his mind, in reasoning, illustration, and serious appeal, to impress some one important idea on some one class of persons to whom it was most specifically applicable, and has perceived the plainest indications, both at the instant and immediately after, that it was an attempt of the same kind as that of demolishing a tower by attacking it with pebbles. Nor do I need to observe how generally, if a momentary impression is made, it is forgotten the following hour.

A sincere disciple of christianity may with great reluctance admit the conviction of such an awful disproportion between the apparatus, if I may so express it, of the christian means, as left

to be put in action by mere human energy, and the object to which they are to be applied. But how is he to avoid it? Is he in this one selected instance to reject with scorn that method of reasoning from facts, which has been the grand instrument of ascertaining truth in other departments of inquiry? Or if he *is* to reason from a view of the world, how is his imagination (if he has taken some pains to reduce its ascendency) to fabricate before his eyes a different world of facts from that on which he is coolly fixing his attention? If after such a cool observation of mankind, I repeat the representation made in the preceding paragraph, who is prepared to tell that an opposite description would be the true one, and that an immense number of persons, even educated persons, do *not* receive the christian declarations with indifference, or reject them with contempt? But if the melancholy statement cannot be contradicted, by what ingenuity am I to draw from it the very same inference which every reasoner would instantly have drawn from the exactly contrary state of facts, the inference that the means are competent to produce the desired effect without extraordinary intervention? Till this ingenuity can be attained, I am doomed to listen with a degree of wonder, when some of the believers and advocates of the gospel are avowing high anticipations of its progressive efficacy solely by means of the force which it carries as a rational address to rational creatures. I cannot help inquiring what length of time is to be allowed for the experiment which is to prove that no special divine assistance is needful? Nor

can it be uncandid to ask what is the state of the experiment and the success, among those who reject every idea of such a divine influence as a tenet of miserable fanaticism. Might it not be prudent to moderate a little the expressions of contempt for the persuasion which prompts many christians to ask the special assistance of the Almighty, till the success without it shall be greater? There will be no attempt to deny that the effect of the christian means, in converting vain and wicked men, though small at best, is greater among those who implore this agency of heaven, than among those who deny any such operation on the mind. But surely the question respecting the actual measure of effect produced by the administration of religion, or therefore likely to be produced, till there shall be some great change in the moral economy of the world, is altogether independent of every theological system; as much so as any of the problems of science. It is a question to be decided by facts; and which no doubt the persons that I have alluded to would decide in the same manner that I have done, if it could be detached from all connexion with system and party, and left purely to the knowledge and good sense for which so many of them are distinguished.

But, when I introduced the mention of reformers and their plans, I did not refer in any view to Christianity, but to those speculations and schemes for the amendment of mankind, which anticipate their effect independently of its assistance, some of them perhaps silently coinciding with several of its principles, while others expressly disclaim

them. Unless these schemes bring with them, like spirits from Heaven, an intrinsic competence to the great operation, without being met or aided by any considerable degree of favourable disposition in the nature of the Subject, it is too probable that they will disappoint their fond projectors. I cannot help the ungracious perception, in viewing the general character of the race, that after some allowance for what is called natural affection, and for compassionate sympathy, (an excellent principle, but extremely limited and often capricious in its operation,) the main strength of human feelings consists in the love of sensual gratification, of distinction, of power, and of money. And by what suicidal inconsistency are these principles to lend their force to accomplish the schemes of pure reason and virtue, which, they will not fail to perceive, are plotting against them* ? And if *they* have far too perfect an instinct to be trepanned into such an employment of their force, and yet are the preponderating agents in the human heart, what *other* active principles of it can the renovator of human character call to his effectual aid, against the evils which are accumulated and defended by what is at once the baser and the stronger part? Whatever principles of a better kind there may be in the nature, they can hold but a feeble and inert existence under this predominance of the worse, and could make but a faint insurrection

* I am here reminded of the Spanish story of a village, where the devil, having made the people excessively wicked, was punished by being compelled to assume the appearance and habit of a friar, and to preach so eloquently, in spite of his internal repugnance and rage, that the inhabitants were completely reformed.

in favour of the invading virtue. The very worst of them may indeed seem to become its allies when it happens, as it occasionally will, that the practical proceedings which reforming virtue enforces, fall in the same line in which these meaner principles can promote their interests. Then, and so far, an unsound coincidence may take place, and the external effect of those principles may be clad in specious appearances of virtue; but the moment that the reforming projector summons their co-operation to a service in which they must desert their own object and their corrupt character, they will desert *him*. As long as he is condemned to depend, for the efficacy of his schemes, on the aid of so much pure propensity as he shall find in the corrupted Subject, he will be nearly in the case of a man attempting to climb a tree by laying hold, first on this side, and then on that, of some rotten twig, which still breaks off in his hand, and lets him fall among the nettles.

Look again to the state of facts. Collective man *is* human nature; and the conduct of this assemblage, under the diversified experiments continually made on it, expresses its true character, and indicates what may be expected from it. Now then, to what principle in human nature, as thus illustrated by trial, could you with confidence appeal in favour of any of the great objects which a benevolent man desires to see accomplished? If there were in it any one grand principle of goodness which an earnest call and a great occasion would raise into action, to assert or redeem the character of the species, one

should think it would be what we call Humanity. Consider then, in this nation for instance, which extols its own generous virtues to the sky, what lively and rational appeals have been made to the whole community, respecting the slave trade, the condition of the poor, and the hateful mass of cruelty inflicted on brute animals, not to glance toward the horrid sacrifices in that temple of Moloch named honourable war, which has been kept open more than half the past century:—all these appeals substantially in vain: And why in vain? If humanity *were* a powerful principle in the nature of the people, they would not, in contempt of knowledge, expostulation, and spectacles of misery, persist in the most enormous violations of it. Why in vain? but plainly because there is not enough of the virtue of humanity, not even in what is deemed a highly cultivated state of the human nature, to answer to the pathetic call. Or if this be not the cause, let the idolaters of human divinity call, like the worshippers of Baal, in a louder voice. Their success will too probably be the same; they will obtain no exertion of power, though they cry from morning till the setting sun. And meanwhile the observer, who foresees their disappointment, would think himself warranted, but for the melancholy feeling that the nature is his own, to mock their expectations.—You know that a multitude of exemplifications might be added. And the thought of so many great and interesting objects, relating to the human economy, as a sober appreciation of means seems to place beyond the reach of the moral revolution-

ist*, will often, if he has genuine benevolence, make him sad. He will repeat to himself, "How easy it is to conceive these inestimable improvements, and how nobly they would exalt my species; but how to work them into the actual condition of man!—Are there somewhere in possibility," he will ask, "intellectual and moral engines mighty enough to perform the great process? Where in darkness is the sacred repository in which they lie? What Marraton† shall explore the unknown way to it? The man who would not be glad, in exchange for the discovery of this treasury of powers, to shut up for ever the mines of Potosi, would deserve to be immured as the last victim of those deadly caverns."

But each speculative visionary thinks the discovery is made; and while surveying his own great magazine of expedients, consisting of Fortunatus's cap, the philosopher's stone, Aladdin's lamp, and other efficient articles, he is confident that the work may speedily be done. These powerful instruments of amelioration perhaps lose their individual names under the general denomination of Philosophy, a term that would be venerable, if it could be saved from the misfortune of being hackneyed into cant.

* It is obvious that I am not supposing this moral revolutionist to be armed with any power but that of persuasion. If he were a monarch, and possessed virtue and talents equal to his power, the case would be materially different. Even then, he would accomplish but little compared with what he could imagine, and would desire; yet, to all human appearance, he might be the instrument of wonderfully changing the condition of society within his Empire. If the soul of Alfred could return to the earth!—

† Spectator, No. 56.

and from the impiety of substituting its expedients in the place of divine power. But it is of little consequence what denomination the projectors assume to themselves or their schemes. It is by their fruits that we shall know them. Their work is before them; the scene of moral disorder presents to them the plagues which they are to stop, the mountain which they are to remove, the torrent which they are to divert, the desert which they are to clothe in verdure and bloom. Let them make their experiment, and add each his page to the gloomy records in which experience contemns the folly of imagination*.

* In reading lately some part of a well-written book published a few years since, I came to the following passage, which though in connexion indeed with the subject of *elections*, expresses the author's general opinion of the state of society, and of the means of exalting it to wisdom and virtue. "The bulk of the commu-" nity begin to examine, to feel, to understand, their rights and " duties. *They only require the fostering care of the Philoso-" pher to ripen them into complete rationality*, and furnish them " with the requisites of political and moral action." Here I paused to indulge my wonder. The fostering care of a Philosopher! Why then is not the Philosopher about his business? Why does he not go and indoctrinate a company of peasants in the intervals of a ploughing or a harvest day, when he will find them far more eager for his instructions than for drink? Why does he not introduce himself among a circle of farmers, who cannot fail, as he enters, to be very judiciously discussing, with the aid of their punch and their pipes, the most refined questions respecting their rights and duties, and wanting but exactly *his* aid, instead of more punch and tobacco, to possess themselves completely of the requisites of political and moral action? The population of a manufactory, is another most promising seminary, where all the moral and intellectual endowments are so *nearly* ripe, that he will seem less to have the task of cultivating than the pleasure of reaping. Even among the company in the ale-house, though the Philosopher might at first be sorry, and might wonder, to perceive a slight merge of the moral part of the man in the sensitive, and to find in so vociferous a mood, that inquiring reason which, he had supposed, would be waiting for him with the silent anxious docility of a pupil of Pythagoras; yet he would find a most powerful pre-

All the speculations and schemes of the sanguine projectors of all ages, have left the world still a prey to infinite legions of vices and miseries, an immortal band which has trampled in scorn on the monuments and the dust of the self-idolizing men who dreamed, each in his day, that they were born to chase these evils out of the earth. If these vain demigods of an hour, who trusted to change the world, and who perhaps wished to change it only to make it a temple to their fame, could be awaked from the unmarked graves into which they sunk, to look a little while round on the world for some traces of the success of their projects, would they not be eager to retire again into the chambers of death, to hide the shame of their remembered presumption? The wars and tyranny, the rancour, cruelty, and revenge, together with all the other unnumbered vices and crimes with which the earth is still infested, are enough, if the whole mass could be brought within the bounds of any one even the most extensive empire, to constitute its whole population literally infernals, all but their being incarnate, and that indeed they would soon, through mutual destruction, cease to be. Hith-

disposition to truth and virtue, and there would be every thing to hope from the accuracy of his logic, the comprehensiveness of his views, and the beauty of his moral sentiments. But perhaps it will be explained, that the Philosopher does not mean to visit all these people in person; but that having first secured the *source* of influence, having taken entire possession of princes, nobility, gentry, and clergy, which he expects to do in a very short time, he will manage *them* like an electrical machine, to operate on the bulk of the community. Either way the achievement will be great and admirable; the *latter* event seems to have been predicted in that sibylline sentence, "When the sky falls, we shall catch larks."

erto the fatal cause of these evils, the corruption of the human heart, has sported with the weakness, or seduced the strength, of all human contrivances to subdue them. Nor do I perceive any signs as yet that we are commencing a better era, in which the means that have failed before, or the expedients of a new and more fortunate invention, shall become irresistible, like the sword of Michael, in our hands. The nature of man still "casts ominous conjecture on the whole success." While *that* is corrupt, it will pervert even the very schemes and operations by which the world should be improved, though their first principles were pure as heaven; and revolutions, great discoveries, augmented science, and new forms of polity, will become in *effect* what may be denominated the sublime mechanics of depravity.

LETTER V.

THIS view of moral and philosophical projects, in addition to that of the limited exertion of energy with which the Almighty has accompanied, as yet, the dispensation of the gospel, connected with the impotence of human efforts to make it efficacious where his will does not, forms a melancholy and awful account. In the hours of pensive thought, unless the serious observer can fully resign the condition of man to the infinite

wisdom and goodness of his Creator, he will feel an emotion of horror, as if standing on the verge of a hideous gulf, into which almost all the possibilities, and speculations, and efforts, and hopes relating to the best improvements of mankind, are brought down in a long abortive series by the torrent of ages, to be whelmed and lost in profound and final despair.

To an atheist of enlarged sensibility, if that were a possible character, how gloomy, beyond all power of description, must be the long review, and the undefinable prospect, of this triumph of evil, unaccompanied, as it must appear to his thoughts, by any sublime intelligent process, converting, in some manner unknown to mortals, this evil into good, either during the course or in the final result. A devout theist, when he becomes sad amidst his contemplations, recovers a solemn and submissive tranquillity, by reverting to his assurance of such a wise and omnipotent conduct. As a believer in revelation, he is additionally consoled by the assurance that not only this train of evils will be converted into good in the effect, but the evil itself in this world will at a future period almost cease. He is persuaded that the Great Spirit, who presides over this mysterious scene, has yet an energy of operation in reserve to be unfolded on the earth, such as its inhabitants have never, except in a few momentary glimpses, beheld; and that when his kingdom comes, those powers will be manifested, to command the chaos of turbulent and malignant elements into a new moral world.

And is it not strange, my dear friend, to observe how carefully some philosophers, who deplore the condition of the world, and profess to expect its amelioration, keep their speculations clear of every idea of Divine Interposition? No builders of houses or cities were ever more attentive to guard against the access of inundation or fire. If *He* should but touch their prospective theories of improvement, they would renounce them as defiled and fit only for vulgar fanaticism. Their system of Providence would be profaned by the intrusion of the Almighty. Man is to effect an apotheosis for himself by the hopeful process of exhausting his corruptions. And should it take all but an endless series of ages, vices, and woes, to reach this glorious attainment, patience may sustain itself the while by the thought that when it is realized, it will be burdened with no duty of religious gratitude. No time is too long to wait, no cost too deep to incur, for the triumph of proving that we have no need of that one attribute of a Divinity, which is the strongest cause for adoring him, the benevolence that can make us happy. But even if this triumph should be found unattainable, the independence of spirit which has laboured for it, must not at last sink into piety. This afflicted world, "this poor terrestrial citadel of man," is to lock its gates, and keep its miseries, rather than admit the degradation of receiving help from God.

I wish it were not true that even men who firmly believe, as a general principle, the divine government of the world, are often betrayed into

the impiety of attaching an excessive importance to human agency in its events. How easily a creature of their own species is transformed by a sympathetic pride into a God before them! If what they deem the cause of truth and justice, advances with a splendid front of distinguished names of legislators, or patriots, or generals, it must then and must therefore triumph; such talents, accompanied by the zeal of so many faithful adherents, nothing can withstand. If these shining insects of fame are crushed, or sink into the despicable reptiles of corruption, alas, then, for the cause of truth and justice! All this while, there is no solemn reference to the "Blessed and only Potentate." If however the foundations of their religious faith have not been shaken, and they possess any docility to the lessons of time, they will after a while be taught to withdraw their dependence and confidence from all subordinate agents, and habitually regard the supreme Being as the only power in the creation.

It strikes me as not improbable, that the grand moral improvements of a future age may be accomplished in a manner that shall leave nothing to man but humility and grateful adoration.—His pride so obstinately ascribes to himself whatever good is effected on the globe, that perhaps the Deity will evince his own interposition, by events as obviously independent of human power as the rising of the sun. Perhaps some of them may take place in a manner but little connected even with human operation. Or if the activity of men should be employed as the means of producing all of them, there will probably be

as palpable a disproportion between the instruments and events as there was between the rod of Moses and the stupendous phenomena which followed its being stretched forth. No Israelite was foolish enough to ascribe to the rod the power that divided the sea; nor will any witness of the moral wonders to come attribute them to man.

I hope these extended observations will not appear like an attempt to exhibit the whole stock of means as destitute of all value, and the industrious application of them as a labour without reward. It is not to depreciate a thing, if, in attempting to ascertain its real magnitude, it is proved to be little. It is no injustice to mechanical powers, to say that slender machines will not move rocks and massive timbers; nor to chemical ones, to assert that though an earthquake may fling a promontory from its basis, the explosion of an ounce of powder will not.—Between moral powers also and the objects to which they are applied, there are eternal laws of proportion; and it would seem a most obvious principle of good sense, that an estimate moderately correct of the force of each of our means according to these laws, as far as they can be ascertained, should precede every application of them. Such an estimate has no place in a mind under the ascendency of imagination, which, therefore, by extravagantly magnifying its means, inflates its projects with hopes which may justly be called romantic. The best corrective of such irrational expectation is an appeal to experience. There is an immense record of experiments, which will tell the power

of almost all the engines, as worked by human hands, in the whole moral magazine. And if a man expects any one of them to produce a greater effect than ever before, it must be because the talents of him that repeats the trial, transcend those of all former experimentalists, or else because the season is more auspicious.

The estimate of the power of means, obtained by the appeal to experience, is indeed most humiliating: but what then? It is an humble thing to be a man. The feebleness of means is, in fact, the feebleness of him that employs them; for the most inconsiderable means, when wielded by celestial powers, can produce the most stupendous effects. Till, then, the time shall arrive for us to assume a nobler rank of existence, we must be content to work on the present level of our nature, and effect that little which we can effect; unless it be greater magnanimity and piety to resolve that because our powers are limited to do only little things, they shall therefore, as if in revenge for such an economy, do nothing. Our means will do something; that something is what they were meant to effect in our hands, and not that something else which we all wish they would effect, and a visionary man presumes they will.

This disproportion between the powers and means which mortals are confined to wield, and the great objects which all good men would desire to accomplish, is a part of the appointments of Him who determined all the relations in the universe; and He will see to the consequences. For the present, he seems to say to his servants,

"Forbear to inquire why so small a part of those objects to which I have summoned your activity, is placed within the reach of your powers. Your feeble ability for action is not accompanied by such a capacity of understanding as would be requisite to comprehend why that ability was made no greater. Even if it had been made incomparably greater, would there not still have been objects before it too vast for its operation? Must not the highest of created beings still have something in view, which they feel they can but partially accomplish till their powers are enlarged? Must there not be an end of improvement in my creation, if the powers of my creatures had become perfectly equal to the magnitude of their designs? How mean must be the spirit of that being, that would not make an effort now toward the accomplishment of something higher than he will be able to accomplish till hereafter. Because mightier labourers would have been requisite to effect all that you wish, will you therefore murmur that I have honoured you, the inferior ones, with the appointment of making a noble exertion? If there is but little power in *your* hands, is it not because I retain the power in *mine?* Are you afraid lest that power should fail to do all things right, only because *you* are so little made its instruments? Be grateful that *all* the work is not to be done without you, and that a God employs you in that in which he also is employed. But remember that while the employment is yours, the success is altogether his; and that your diligence therefore, and not the effect which it produces, will be the test of your

characters. Good men have been employed in all ages under the same economy of inadequate means, and what appeared to them inconsiderable success. Go to your labours: every sincere effort will infallibly be one step more in your own progress to a perfect state; and as to the Cause, when *I* see it necessary for a God to interpose in his own manner, I will come."

I should deem a train of observations of the melancholy hue which shades some of the latter pages of this essay, useless, or perhaps even noxous, were I not convinced that a serious exhibition of the feebleness of human agency in relation to all great objects, might aggravate the impression, often so faint, of the absolute supremacy of God, of the total dependence of all mortal effort on him, and of the necessity of devoutly regarding his intervention at every moment. It might promote that last attainment of a zealously good man, the resignation to be as diminutive an agent as God pleases, and as unsuccessful a one. I am assured also that, in a pious mind, the humiliating estimate of means and human power, and the consequent sinking down of all lofty expectations founded on them, will leave one single mean, and that far the best of them all, to be held not only of undiminished but of more eminent value than ever was ascribed to it before.—The noblest of all human means must be that which obtains the exertion of divine power. The means which, introducing no foreign agency, are applied directly and immediately to their objects, seem to bear such a defined proportion as to assign and limit the probable effect. This strict pro-

portion exists no longer, and therefore the possible effects become too great for calculation, when that expedient is solemnly employed, which is appointed as the mean of engaging the divine energy to act on the object. If the only means by which Jehoshaphat sought to overcome his superior enemy, had been his troops, horses, and arms, the proportion between these means and the end would have been perfectly assignable, and the probable result of the conflict a matter of ordinary calculation. But when he said, "Neither know we what to do, but our eyes are up to thee," he moved (I speak it reverently) a new and infinite force to invade the host of Moab and Ammon; and the consequence displayed in their camp the difference between an irreligious leader, who could fight only with arms and on the level of the plain, and a pious one, who could thus assault from Heaven. It may not, I own, be perfectly correct, to cite, in illustration of the efficacy of prayer, the most wonderful ancient examples. Nor is it needful, since the experience of devout and eminently rational men, in latter times, has supplied a great number of striking instances of important advantages so connected with prayer, that they deemed them the evident result of it. This experience, taken in confirmation of the assurances of the bible, warrants ample expectations of the efficacy of an earnest and habitual devotion*; provided still, as I need not remind you, that this mean be employed as the grand

* Here I shall not be misunderstood to believe the multitude of stories which have been told by deluded fancy, or detestable imposture.

auxiliary of the other means, and not alone, till all the rest are exhausted or impracticable. And I am convinced that every man, who, amidst his serious projects, is apprized of his dependence on God, as completely as that dependence is a fact, will be impelled to pray, and anxious to induce his serious friends to pray, almost every hour. He will as little, without it, promise himself any noble success, as a mariner would expect to reach a distant coast by having his sails spread in a stagnation of the air.—I have intimated my fear that it is visionary to expect an unusual success in the human administration of religion, unless there are unusual omens; now a most emphatical spirit of prayer would be such an omen; and the individual who should solemnly determine to try its last possible efficacy, might probably find himself becoming a much more prevailing agent in his little sphere. And if the whole, or greater number, of the disciples of christianity, were, with an earnest, unalterable resolution of each, to combine that Heaven should not withhold one single influence which the very utmost effort of conspiring and persevering supplication would obtain, it would be the sign that a revolution of the world was at hand.

My dear friend, it is quite time to dismiss this whole subject; though it will probably appear to you that I have entirely lost and forgotten the very purpose for which I took it up, which certainly was to examine the correctness of some not unusual applications of the epithet Romantic. It seemed necessary, first, to describe the characteristics of that extravaganee which

ought to be given up to the charge, with some exemplifications. The attempt to do this, has led me into a length of detail of which I had no expectation. The intention was, next, to display and to vindicate, in an extended illustration, several schemes of life, and models of character; but I will not carry the subject any further. I shall only just specify, in concluding, two or three of those points of character, on which the censure of being romantic has improperly fallen.

One is, a disposition to take high examples for imitation. I have condemned that extravagance which presumes on the same career of action and success that has been the destiny of some individuals so extraordinary as to be the most conspicuous phenomena of history. But this is a very different thing from the disposition to contemplate with emotion the class of men who have been illustrious for their excellence and their wisdom, to observe with deep attention the principles that animated them and the process of their attainments, and to keep them in view as the standard of character. A man may, without a presumptuous estimate of his talents, or the expectation of passing through any course of unexampled events, indulge the ambition to resemble and follow, in the essential determination of their characters, those sublime spirits who are now removed to the kingdom where they "shine as the stars for ever and ever."

A striking departure from the order of custom in that rank to which a man belongs, by devoting the privileges of that rank to a mode of excellence which the people who compose it, never

dreamed to be a duty, will by them be denominated romantic. They will wonder why a man that ought to be just like themselves, should affect a quite different style of life, should attempt unusual plans of doing good, should distaste the society of his class, and should put himself under some extraordinary discipline of virtue, though every point of his system may be the dictate of reason and conscience.

The irreligious will apply this epithet to the determination to make, and the zeal to inculcate, great exertions and sacrifices for a purely moral ideal reward. Some gross and palpable prize is requisite to excite their energies, and therefore, self-denial repaid by conscience, beneficence without fame, and the delight of resembling the Divinity, appear very visionary felicities.

The epithet will often be applied to a man who feels it an imperious duty to realize, as far as possible, and as soon as possible, every thing which in theory he approves and applauds. You will often hear a circle of perhaps respectable persons agreeing entirely that this one is an excellent principle of action, and that other an amiable quality, and a third a sublime excellence, who would be amazed at your fanaticism, if you were to adjure them solemnly, and say, "My friends, from this moment you are bound, from this moment we are all bound, on peril of the displeasure of God, to realize in ourselves, to the last possible extent, all that we have thus applauded." Through some fatal defect of conscience, there is a very general feeling, regarding the high order of moral and religious attain-

ments, that though it is a glorious and happy exaltation to possess them, yet it is perfectly safe to stop contented where we are. One is confounded to hear irritable persons applauding a character of self-command, persons who trifle away their days admiring the instances of a strenuous improvement of time, rich persons praising examples of extraordinary beneficence which they know far surpass themselves, though without larger means, and all expressing their deep respect for the men who have been most eminent for devotional habits, and yet apparently with no consciousness that they are themselves placed in a solemn election of henceforth striving in earnest to exemplify this very same pitch of character, or of being condemned in the day of judgment.

Finally, in the application of this epithet, but little allowance is generally made for the very great difference between a man's entertaining high designs and hopes for himself alone, and his entertaining them relative to other persons. It may be very romantic for a man to promise himself to effect such designs upon others as it may be very reasonable to meditate for himself. If he feels the powerful habitual impulse of conviction prompting him to the highest attainments of wisdom and excellence, he may perhaps justly hope to reach them himself, though it would be most extravagant to extend the same hope to all the persons to whom he may try to impart the impulse. I specify the attainments of *wisdom* and *excellence*, because, to the distinction between the designs and hopes which a man might

entertain for himself, and those which he might have respecting others, it is necessary to add a further distinction as to the nature of those which he might entertain *only* for himself. His extraordinary plans and expectations for himself might be of such a nature as to depend on other persons for their accomplishment, and might therefore be as extravagant as if other persons alone had been their object. Or, on the contrary, they may be of a kind which shall not need the cooperation of other persons, and may be realized independently of their will. The design of acquiring immense riches, or becoming the commander of an army, or the legislator of a nation, must in its progress be dependent on other beings besides the individual, in too many thousand points for a considerate man to presume that he shall be fortunate in them all. But the schemes of eminent personal attainments, not depending in any of these ways, are romantic only when there is some fatal intellectual or moral defect in the mind itself which has adopted them.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

ESSAYS

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS

TO A FRIEND,

ON THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

I. ON A MAN'S WRITING MEMOIRS OF HIMSELF.

II. ON DECISION OF CHARACTER.

III. ON THE APPLICATION OF THE EPITHET ROMANTIC.

IV. ON SOME OF THE CAUSES BY WHICH EVANGELICAL RELIGION HAS BEEN RENDERED LESS ACCEPTABLE TO PERSONS OF CULTIVATED TASTE.

BY JOHN FOSTER.

Inspicere, tanquam in speculum, in vitas omnium
Jubeo, atque ex aliis sumere exemplum sibi.
Ter.

TWO VOLUMES IN ONE.

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ESSAY IV.

On some of the Causes by which Evangelical Religion has been rendered unacceptable to persons of cultivated taste.

LETTER I.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WHILE this life is passing so fast away, it is striking to observe the various forms of character in which men choose to spend this introductory season of their being, and to enter on its future greater stage. If some one of these forms is more eligible than all the rest for entering on that greater stage, a thoughtful man will surely wish for that to be his own; and to ascertain which it is, is the most important of all his inquiries. We, my friend, are persuaded that the inquiry, if serious, will soon terminate, and that the christian character will be selected as the only one, in which it is wise to await the call into eternity. Indeed the assurance of our eternal existence itself rests but on that authority which dictates also the right introduction to it.

The christian character is simply a conformity to the whole religion of Christ. But this implies a cordial admission of that whole religion; and it meets, on the contrary, in many minds not denying it to be a communication from God, a disposition to shrink from some of its peculiar distinctions, or to modify them. I am not now to learn that the substantial cause of this, is that repugnance in human nature to what is purely divine, which revelation affirms, and all history proves, and which perhaps some of the humiliating points of the christian system are more adapted to provoke, than any thing else that ever came from heaven. Nor do I need to be told how much this chief cause has aided and aggravated the power of those subordinate ones which may have conspired to prevent the success of evangelical religion among one class of persons, I mean persons of a refined taste, and whose feelings concerning what is great and excellent have been disciplined to accord with a literary or philosophical standard. But even had there been less of this natural aversion in such minds, or had there been none, some of the causes which have acted on them, would, nevertheless, have tended necessarily, as far as they had any operation at all, to lessen the attraction of pure christianity.—I wish to illustrate several of these causes, after briefly describing the antichristian feelings in which I have observed their effect.

It is true that many persons of taste have, without any precise disbelief of the christian truth, so little concern about religion in any form, that the unthinking dislike which they may occasion-

ally feel to the evangelical principles hardly deserves to be described. These are to be assigned, whatever may be their faculties or improvements, to the numerous triflers, on whom we can pronounce only the general condemnation of irreligion, their feelings not being sufficiently marked for a more discriminative censure. But the aversion to the evangelical system is of a more defined character, as it exists in a mind too serious for the follies of the world and the neglect of all religion, and in which the very aversion becomes, at times, the subject of painful and apprehensive reflection, from a consciousness that it is an unhappy symptom, if that view of the subjects by which it is excited, has really the sanction of divine revelation. If a person of such a mind disclosed himself to you, he would describe how the elevated sentiment, inspired by the contemplation of other sublime subjects, is confounded, and sinks mortified into the heart, when this new subject is presented to his view. It seems to require almost a total change of his mental habits to admit this as the most interesting subject of all, while yet he dares not reject the authority which supports its claims. The dignity of religion, as a general and refined speculation, he may have long acknowledged; but it appears to him as if it lost part of that dignity, in taking the specific form of the evangelical system; just as if an ethereal being were reduced to combine his radiance and subtilty with an earthly nature. He is aware that religion in the abstract, or in other words, the principles which constitute the relation of all intelligent creatures

indiscriminately with the Deity, must receive a special modification, by means of the addition of some other principles, in order to become a peculiar religious economy for a particular race of those creatures, especially for a little and a guilty race. And the christian revelation assigns the principles by which this religion in the abstract, the religion of the universe, is thus modified into the peculiar form required for the nature and condition of man. But when he contemplates some of these principles, which do indeed place our nature and condition in a very humbling point of view, he can with difficulty avoid regretting that our relations with the divinity should be fixed according to *such* an economy. The gospel appears to him like the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, refulgent indeed with a head of gold; the sublime truths which are independent of every peculiar dispensation are luminously exhibited; but the doctrines which are added as descriptive of the peculiar circumstances of the christian economy, appear less splendid, and as if descending towards the qualities of iron and clay. In admitting this portion of the system as a part of the truth, his feelings amount to the wish that a different theory *had been true*. It is therefore with a degree of shrinking reluctance that he sometimes adverts to the ideas peculiar to the gospel. He would willingly lose this specific scheme of doctrines in a more general theory of religion, instead of resigning every wider speculation for this scheme, in which God has comprised, and distinguished by a very peculiar character, all the religion

which he wills to be known, or to be useful, to our world. He would gladly evade the conviction that the gospel is so far from being merely one of the modes, or merely even the best of the modes, of religion, that it is, as to us, the comprehensive and exclusive mode; insomuch that he who has not a religion concordant with the new testament, is without a religion. He suffers himself to pass the year in a dissatisfied uncertainty, and a criminal neglect of deciding, whether his cold reception of the specific views of christianity will render unavailing his regard for those more general truths respecting the Deity, moral rectitude, and a future state, which are necessarily at the basis of the system. He is afraid to examine and determine the question, whether it will be safe to rest in a scheme composed of the general principles of wisdom and virtue, selected from the christian oracles and the speculations of philosophy, harmonized by reason, and embellished by taste. If it were safe, he would much rather be the dignified professor of such a philosophic refinement of christianity, than yield himself to be completely humbled into a submissive disciple of Jesus Christ. This refined system would be clear of the unwelcome peculiarities of christian doctrine, and it would also allow some different ideas of the nature of moral excellence. He would not be so explicitly condemned for indulging a disposition to admire and imitate some of those models of character which, however opposite to pure christian excellence, the world has always idolized.

I wish I could display, in the most forcible manner, the considerations which shew how far such a state of mind is wrong. But, for the present, my object is to remark on a few of the causes which may have contributed to it.

I do not, for a moment, place among these causes that continual dishonour which the religion of Christ has suffered, through the corrupted institutions, and the depraved character of individuals or communities of what is called the christian world. Such a man as I have supposed, understands what its tendency and dictates really are, so far at least that, in contemplating the bigotry, persecution, hypocrisy, and worldly ambition, which have stained, and continue to stain, the christian history, his mind instantly dissevers, by a decisive glance of thought, all these evils, and the pretended christians who are accountable for them, from the religion which is as distinct from them as the Spirit that pervades all things is pure from matter and from sin. In his view, these odious things and these wicked men that have arrogated and defiled the christian name, sink out of sight through a chasm, like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and leave the camp and the cause holy, though they leave the numbers small. It needs so very moderate a share of discernment, in a protestant country at least, where a well-known volume exhibits the religion itself genuine and entire as it came from heaven, to perceive the utter disconnexion and antipathy between it and all these abominations, that to take them as congenial and inseparable, betrays, in every instance, a detestable want of

principle, or a pitiable want of sense. The defect of cordiality toward the religion of Christ, in the persons that I am accusing, does not arise from this debility or this injustice. They would not be less equitable to christianity than they would to some estimable man, whom they would not esteem the less because villains that hated him, knew, however, so well the excellence of his name and character, as gladly to employ them to aid their schemes, or to shelter their crimes.—But indeed these remarks are not strictly to the purpose; since the prejudice which a weak or corrupt mind receives from such a view of the christian history, operates, as we see by facts, not against particular characteristics of christianity, but indiscriminately against the whole system, and leads towards a denial of its divine origin. On the contrary, the persons now in question fully admit its divine authority, but feel a deep dislike to some of its most peculiar distinctions. These peculiarities they may wish, as I have said, to refine away, but, in moments of impartial seriousness, are constrained to admit the conviction, or something very near the conviction, of their being inseparable from the sacred economy. This however fails to subdue or conciliate the heart; and the dislike to some of the parts has often an influence on the affections in regard to the whole. That portion of the system which they *could* admire is admitted with the coldness of a mere speculative assent, from the intruding recollection of its being combined with something else which they cannot admire. Those distinctions from which they recoil,

are chiefly comprised in that view of christianity which, among a large portion of the professors of it, is denominated, in a somewhat specific sense, Evangelical, and therefore I have adopted this denomination in the title of this letter. Christianity taken in this view contains a humiliating estimate of the moral condition of man, the doctrine of redemption from that condition by the merit and sufferings of Christ, the doctrine of a divine influence being necessary to transform the character of the human mind, in order to prepare it for a higher station in the universe, and a grand moral peculiarity by which it insists on humility, penitence, and a separation from the spirit and habits of the world.

I may here notice that, though the greater share of the injurious influences on which I may remark operates more distinctly against the peculiar *doctrines* of christianity, yet some of them are fatally hostile to that *moral spirit* which the religion partly retains, even when reduced, toward the form of a mere philosophical theory. And I would observe finally, that though I have specified the more refined and intellectual class of minds, as indisposed to the religion of Christ by the causes to which I refer, and though I keep them principally in view, yet the influence of some of these causes extends to many persons of subordinate mental rank.

LETTER II.

In the view of an intelligent and honest mind the religion of Christ stands as clear of all connexion with the corruption of men, and churches, and ages, as when it was first revealed. It retains its purity like Moses in Egypt, or Daniel in Babylon, or the Saviour of the world himself while he mingled with scribes and pharisees, or publicans and sinners. But though it thus instantly and totally separates itself from all appearance of relation to the vices of bad men, a certain degree of effort may be required in order to display it, or to view it, in an equally perfect separation from the weakness of good ones. It is not really more *identified* with the one than with the other; its sublimity is as distinct from littleness, as its purity is from vice. But it may have a vital connexion with a weak mind, while it necessarily disowns a wicked one; and the qualities of that mind with which it unites itself, will much more seem to adhere to it, than of that with which all its principles are in total antipathy. It will be more natural to take those persons who are acknowledged the real subjects of its influence, as illustrations of its nature, than those on whom it may be charged as one of the greatest of their crimes, that they pretend to be its friends. The perception of its nature and dignity must be very vivid in the man who can observe it as intimately combined with the thoughts, affections,

and language of its disciples, without losing sight for one moment of its essential qualities and lustre. No possible associations indeed can diminish the grandeur of some parts of the christian system. The doctrine of immortality, for instance, cannot be reduced to an appearance of littleness by the meanest or most uncouth words and images that shall ever be employed to represent it. Its intrinsic majesty redeems it from the momentary depression. But there are some other points of the system which have not the same obvious philosophic sublimity. And these principles are capable of acquiring from the mental defects of their believers, such associations as will give a character very different from our common ideas of sublimity to so much as they constitute of the evangelical economy. One of the causes therefore which I meant to notice, as having excited in persons of taste a sentiment unfavourable to the reception of evangelical religion, is, that this is the religion of many weak and uncultivated minds.

The schools of philosophy have been composed chiefly of men of superior faculties and extensive accomplishments, who could sustain the dignity of the favourite doctrines, by the knowledge, penetration, and eloquence, which were but the common qualifications of their disciples and advocates. They could attract refined and aspiring spirits by proclaiming, that the temple of *their* goddess was no rendezvous for vulgar men. On the contrary, it is the beneficent distinction of the gospel, that, notwithstanding it is of a magnitude to interest and to surpass an-

gelic investigation, (and therefore assuredly to pour contempt on the pride of human intelligence that rejects it for its *meanness,)* it is yet most expressly sent to the class which philosophers have always despised. And a good man feels it a cause of grateful joy, that a communication has come from heaven, adapted to effect the happiness of multitudes, in spite of natural debility or neglected education. He is grateful to him who has "hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to babes," while he observes that confined capacities do not preclude the entrance, and the permanent residence, of that sacred combination of truth and power, which finds no place in the minds of many philosophers, and wits, and statesmen. But it is not to be denied that the natural consequence follows. Contracted and obscured in its abode, the inhabitant will appear, as the sun through a misty sky, with but little of its magnificence, to a man who can be content to regard the weakest mode of displaying itself to which it can be reduced, as the noblest to which it can be elevated. In taking such a dwelling, the religion seems to imitate what was prophesied of its author, that, when he should be seen, there would be no beauty that he should be desired. This humiliation is inevitable; for unless miracles are wrought, to impart to the less intellectual disciples an enlarged power of thinking, the evangelical truth must accommodate itself to the dimensions and unrefined habitudes of their minds. And perhaps the exhibitions of it will come forth with more of the character of those minds than

of its own celestial distinctions: insomuch that if there were no declaration of the sacred system, but in the forms of conception and language in which they declare it, even a very candid man might hesitate to admit it as the most glorious gift of heaven. Happily, he finds the subject imparted by other oracles; but while from them he receives it in its own character, he is tempted to wish he could detach it from all the associations which he feels it has acquired from the humbler exhibition. And he does not greatly wonder that other men of the same intellectual habits, and with a less candid and profound solicitude to receive with simplicity every thing that really comes from God, should have admitted a very injurious impression from these associations.

They would not make this impression on a man already devoted to the religion of Jesus Christ. No great passion is ever cooled by any thing which can be associated with its object, while that object itself continues unaltered. The passion is even willing to verify its power, and the merit of that which interests it, by sometimes letting the unpleasing associations surround and touch the object for an instant, and then chasing them away; and it welcomes with augmented attachment that object coming forth from them unstained; as happy spirits at the last day will receive with joy their bodies recovered from the dust in a state of purity that will leave every thing belonging to the dust behind. A zealous christian exults to feel in contempt of how many counteracting circumstances he can

still love his religion, and that this counteraction, by exciting his understanding to make a more discriminative estimate of its excellence, has but made him love it the more. It has now pre-occupied even those avenues of taste and imagination, by which alone the ungracious effect of associations could have been admitted. The thing itself is close to his mind, and therefore the causes which would have misrepresented it, by coming between, have lost their power. As he hears the sentiments of sincere christianity from the weak and illiterate, he says to himself—All this is indeed little, but I am happy to feel that the subject itself is great, and that this humble display of it cannot make it appear to me different from what I absolutely know it to be; any more than a clouded atmosphere can diminish my impression of the grandeur of the heavens, after I have so often beheld the pure azure, and the host of stars. I am glad that it has in this man all the consolatory and all the purifying efficacy which I wish that my more elevated views of it may never fail to have in me. This is the chief end for which a divine communication can have been granted to the world. If this religion had been of a nature to seek to acquire lustre to itself from the mental dignity of its disciples, rather than to make them pure and happy amidst their littleness, it would have been sent to none of us. At least, not to me; for though I would be grateful for an order of ideas somewhat superior to those of my uncultivated fellow-christian, I am conscious that the noblest forms of thought in which I apprehend, or could represent, the sub-

ject, do but contract its amplitude, do but depress its sublimity. Those superior spirits who are said to rejoice over the first proof of the efficacy of divine truth, have rejoiced over its introduction, even in so humble a form, into the mind of this man, and probably see in fact but little difference, in point of speculative greatness, between his manner of viewing and illustrating it and mine. If Jesus Christ could be on earth as before, he would receive this disciple, and benignantly approve, for its operation on the heart, that faith in his doctrines, which men of taste might be tempted to despise for its want of intellectual refinement. And since all his true disciples are destined to attain greatness at length, the time is coming, when each pious though now contracted mind will do justice to this high subject. Meanwhile, such as this subject will appear to the intelligence of immortals, and such as it will be expressed in their eloquence, such it really is now; and I should deplore the perversity of my mind, if I felt more disposed to take the character of the religion from that style of its exhibition in which it appears humiliated, than from that in which I am assured it will be sublime. If, while we are all advancing to meet the revelations of eternity, I have a more vivid and comprehensive idea than these less privileged christians, of the glory of our religion, as displayed in the new testament, and if I can much more delightfully participate the sentiments which devout genius has uttered in the contemplation of it, I am therefore called upon to excel

them as much in devotedness to this religion, as I have a more luminous view of its excellence.

Let the spirit of the evangelical system once gain the ascendency, and it may thus defy the impressions tending to associate disagreeable ideas with its principles; as the angels in the house of Lot forced away the unworthy assailants. But it requires a most extraordinary energy of conviction, to obtain a cordial reception for these principles, if such impressions have pre-occupied the mind. And that they should thus have pre-occupied the man of taste, is not wonderful, if you consider how early, how often, and by what diversities of the same general cause they may have been made on him. As the gospel comprises an ample assemblage of intellectual views, and as the greater number of christians are inevitably disqualified to do justice to them, even in any degree, by the same causes which disqualify them to do justice to other intellectual subjects, it is not improbable, that the greater number of expressions which he has heard in his whole life, have been utterly below the subject. Obviously this is a very serious circumstance; for if he had heard as much spoken on any other intellectual subject, as for instance, poetry, or astronomy, for which perhaps he has a passion, and if a similar proportion of what he had heard had been as much below the subject, he would probably have acquired but little partiality for either of those studies. And it is a very melancholy deposition against the human heart, that the gospel needs fewer unfavour-

able associations, to become unacceptable to it, than any other important subject.

The injurious impressions have perhaps struck his mind in many ways. For instance, he has met with some zealous christians, who not only were very slightly acquainted with the evidences of the truth, and the illustrations of the reasonableness, of their religion, but who actually felt no interest in the inquiry. Perhaps more than one individual attempted to deter him from pursuing it, by suggesting that inquiry either implies doubt, which was pronounced a criminal state of mind, or will probably lead to it, as a judgment on the profane curiosity which, on such a subject, was not satisfied with implicitly believing. It was thought that an attempt to lay bare the foundation would be likely to end in a wish to demolish the structure.

He may sometimes have heard the discourse of sincere christians, whose religion involved no intellectual exercise, and, strictly speaking, no *subject* of intellect. Separately from their feelings, it had no definition, no topics, no distinct succession of views. And if he or some other person attempted to talk on some part of the religion *itself*, as a thing definable and important, independently of the feelings of any individual, and as consisting in a vast congeries of ideas, relating to the divine government of the world, to the nature of the economy disclosed by the Messiah, to the distinct doctrines deducible from that economy, to moral principles, and to the greatness of the future prospects of man, they seemed to have no concern in *that* religion, and impa-

tiently interrupted the subject with the observation—That is not experience.

Others he has heard continually recurring to two or three points of opinion, selected perhaps in conformity to a system, or perhaps in consequence of some casual direction of the individual's thoughts, and asserted to be the life and essence of christianity. These opinions he has heard zealously though not argumentatively defended, even when they were not attacked or questioned. If they *were* called in question, it was an evidence not less of depraved principle than of perverted judgment. All other religious truths were represented as deriving their authority and importance purely from these, and indeed as deriving so little authority and importance, that it was almost needless ever to advert to them. The neglect of constantly repeating and enforcing these opinions was said to be the chief cause of the melancholy failure attending the efforts to promote christianity in the world, and of the decay of particular religious societies. Though he could not perceive how these points were essential to christianity, even admitting them to be true, they were made the sole and decisive standard for distinguishing between a genuine and false profession of it. And perhaps they were abruptly applied in eager haste to any sentiment which *he* happened to express concerning religion, as a test of its quality, and a proof of its corruptness.

In some instances, he may have observed some one idea or doctrine, though not especially sanctioned by any system, to have so monopolized

the mind, that every conversation, from whatever point of the compass it started, was certain to find its way to the favourite topic, while he was sometimes fretted, sometimes amused, and never much improved, by observing its progress to the appointed place. If his situation and connexions rendered it unavoidable for him often to hear this unfortunate manner of discoursing on religion, his mind probably fell into a fault very similar to that of his well-meaning acquaintance. As this worthy man could never speak on the subject without soon bringing the whole of it down to one particular point, so the more refined and intellectual listener became unable to think on the subject without adverting immediately to the narrow illustration of it exhibited by this one man. In consequence of this connexion of ideas he perhaps became disinclined to think on the subject at all; or, if he was disposed or constrained to think of it, he was so averse to let his views of christianity thus converge to the littleness of a point, that he laboured to expand them till they lost all specifically evangelical distinctions in the wideness of generality and abstraction.

Again, the majority of christians are precluded, by their condition in life, from any acquirement of general knowledge. It would be unpardonable in this more cultivated man not to make the allowance for the natural effect of this circumstance on the extent of their religious ideas. But he has met with numbers, who had no inconsiderable means, both as to money, judging by their unnecessary expenses, and as to leisure, judging by the quantity of time consumed in

useless chat, or in needless sleep, to furnish their minds with various information, but who were quite on a level, in this respect, with those of the humblest rank. They never even suspected that knowledge could have any connexion with religion, or that they could not be as clearly and amply in possession of the great subject as a man whose faculties had been exercised, and whose extended acquaintance with things would supply an endless series of ideas illustrative of religion. He has perhaps even heard them make a kind of merit of their indifference to knowledge, as if it were the proof or the result of a higher value for religion. If a hint of wonder was insinuated at their reading so little, and within so very confined a scope, it would be replied, that they thought it enough to read the bible; as if it were possible for a person whose mind fixes with inquisitive attention on what is before him, even to read through the bible without at least ten thousand such questions being started in his mind as can be answered only from sources of information extraneous to the bible. But he perceived that this reading the bible was no work of inquisitive thought; and indeed he has commonly found that those who have no wish for any thing like a general improvement in knowledge, have no disposition for the real business of thinking, even in religion, and that their discourse on that subject is the disclosure of intellectual poverty. He has seen them live on for a number of years content with the same confined views, the same meagre list of topics, and the same uncouth religious language. In so con-

siderable a space of time, the diligent investigation of truth would have given much more clearness to their faculties, and much more precision to the articles of their belief. They might have ramified the few leading articles into a rich diversity of subordinate principles and important inferences. They might have learned to place the christian truth in all those combinations with the other parts of our knowledge, by which it is enabled to present new and striking aspects, and to multiply its arguments to the understanding, and its appeals to the heart. They might have rendered nature, history, and the present views of the moral world, tributary to the illustration and the effect of their religion. But they neglected, and even despised, all these means of enlarging their ideas of a subject which they professed to hold of infinite importance. Yet perhaps, if this man of more intellectual habits shewed but little interest in conversing with them on that subject, or sometimes seemed anxious to avoid it, this was considered as pure aversion to religion; and what had been uninteresting as doctrine, became revolting as reproof.*

He may not unfrequently have heard worthy but illiterate persons expressing their utmost admiration of sayings, passages in books, or public discourses, which he could not help perceiving were but imperfectly sense. While on the other hand, when he has introduced a favourite pas-

* I own that what I said of Jesus Christ's gladly receiving one of the humbler intellectual order for his disciple, will but ill apply to some of the characters, that I describe.

sage, or an admired book, they have perhaps shewn no perception of its beauty, or expressed a doubt of its tendency, from its not being in the language of common-place. Or perhaps they have directly avowed that they could not understand it, in a manner that very plainly implied that *therefore* it was of no value. Possibly when he has expressed his high admiration of some of the views of the gospel, such, for instance, as struck the mind of Rousseau, he has been mortified to find that some sublime distinctions of the religion of Christ are lost to many of his disciples, from being of too abstract a kind for the apprehension of any but improved and reflective men.

If he had generally found in those christian professors whose intellectual powers and attainments were small, a candid humility, instructing them, while expressing their animated gratitude for what acquaintance with religion they had been able to attain, and for the immortal hopes springing from it, to feel that they had but a confined view of a subject which is of immense variety and magnitude, he would have been too much pleased by this amiable feeling, to be much repelled by the defective character of their conceptions and expressions. But often on the contrary he has observed such a complacent sense of sufficiency in the little sphere, as if it comprised every thing which it is possible, or which it is of consequence, for any mind to see in the christian religion. They were like persons who should doubt the information that an incomparably greater number of stars can be seen through

a telescope than they ever beheld, and who have no curiosity to try.

Many christians may have appeared to him to attach an extremely disproportionate importance to the precise *modes* of religious observances, not only in the hour of controversy respecting them, when they are always magnified far beyond their real consequence, but in the habitual course of their religious references. These modes may be either such as are adhered to by whole communities of christians, perhaps as their respective marks of distinction from one another; or any smaller ceremonial peculiarities, devised and pleaded for by particular individuals or families.

The religious habits of some christians may have disgusted him excessively. Every thing which could even distantly remind him of grimace, would inevitably do this; as for instance, a solemn lifting up of the eyes, artificial impulses of the breath, grotesque and regulated gestures and postures in religious exercises, an affected faltering of the voice, and, I might add, abrupt religious exclamations in common discourse, though they were even benedictions to the Almighty, which he has often heard so ill-timed as to have an irreverent and almost a ludicrous effect. In a mind such as I am supposing, the greatest additional veneration for genuine religion will produce no degree of tolerance for these habits. Nor will the dislike to them be lessened by ever so perfect a conviction of the sincere piety of the persons who practise them.

In the conversation of illiterate christians he has perhaps frequently heard the most unfortu-

nate metaphors and similes employed to explain or enforce evangelical sentiments; and probably, if he twenty times recollected one of those sentiments, or if he heard a similar one from some other quarter, the repulsive figure was sure to recur to his imagination. If he has heard so many of these, that each christian topic has acquired its appropriate image, you can easily conceive what a lively perception of the importance of the subject itself must be requisite to preclude the disgust and banish the associations. The feeling accompanying these topics, as connected with these ideas, will be somewhat like that which spoils the pleasure of reading a noble poet, Virgil for instance, when each admired passage recalls the images into which it has been degraded in that kind of imitation denominated *travesty*. It may be added, that the reluctance to think of the subject because it is connected with these ideas, strengthens that connexion. For often the earnest wish not to dwell on the disagreeable images, produces a mischievous re-action by which they press more forcibly on the mind. The tenacity with which ideas adhere to the mind, is in proportion to the degree of interest, whether pleasing or unpleasing, which accompanies them; and an idea cannot well be accompanied by a stronger kind of interest than the earnest wish to escape from it. If we could cease to dislike it, it would soon cease to haunt us. It may also be observed, that the infrequency of thinking upon the evangelical subjects, will confirm the injurious associations. The same mental law operates in regard to subjects as in regard to

persons. If any unfortunate incident, or any circumstance of expression or conduct, displeased us in our first meeting with a person, it will be strongly recalled each subsequent time that we see him, if we meet him but seldom; on the contrary, if our intercourse with a person becomes frequent or habitual, not only such a first unpleasing circumstance, but many following ones, are forgotten.—This observation might be of some use to a man that really wishes to dissolve in his mind the connexion between evangelical subjects and such disagreeable ideas; as he will perceive that one of the most effectual means would be to make those subjects familiar by often thinking of them.

While remarking on the effect of unpleasing images employed to illustrate christian principles, I cannot help wishing that religious teachers were aware of the propriety of not amplifying the less dignified class of those metaphors which it may be proper enough sometimes to introduce, and which perhaps are employed, in a short and rapid way, in the bible. I shall notice only that common one in which the benefits and pleasures of religion are represented under the image of food. I do not recollect that, in the new testament at least, this metaphor is ever drawn to a great length. But from the facility of the process, it is not strange that it has been amplified both in books and discourses into the most extended description; and the dining-room has been exhausted of images, and the language ransacked for substantives and adjectives, to stimulate the spiritual palate. The metaphor is combined

with so many terms in our language, that it will sometimes unavoidably occur, and when employed in the simplest and shortest form, it may, by transiently suggesting the analogy, assist the thought without lessening the subject. But it is degrading to spiritual ideas to be extensively and systematically transmuted, I might even say *cooked* into sensual ones. The analogy between mean things and dignified ones should never be pursued further than one or two points of necessary illustration; for if it is traced to every circumstance in which a resemblance can be found or fancied, the mean thing no longer serves the humble and useful purpose of merely illustrating some qualities of the great one, but becomes formally its representative and equal. By their being made to touch at all points, the meaner is constituted a scale to measure and to limit the magnitude of the superior, and thus the importance of the one shrinks to the insignificance of the other. It will take some time for a man to recover any great degree of solemnity in thinking on the delights or the supports of religion, after he has seen them reduced into all the forms of eating and drinking. In such amplified analogies it often happens, that the most fanciful or that the coarsest points of the resemblance remain longest in the thoughts. When the mind has been taught to descend to a low manner of considering divine truth, it will easily descend to the lowest. There is no such violent tendency to abstraction and sublimity in the minds of the generality of readers and hearers, as to render it necessary to take any great pains for the purpose

of retaining their ideas in some small degree of alliance with matter.

The preceding pages are a short description of some of the prominent circumstances of repellency, which are connected with evangelical religion by means of its uncultivated and injudicious professors; and more might have been added. After such a description, it would be unjust not to observe that some christians, of a subordinate intellectual order, are distinguished by such an unassuming simplicity, by so much refinement of conscience, and by a piety so fervent and even exalted, that it would imply a very perverted state of mind in a cultivated man, if these examples did not operate, notwithstanding the confined scope of their ideas, to attract him toward the faith which renders them so happy and excellent, rather than to repel him from it. But I am *supposing* his mind to be in a perverted state, and am infinitely far from the impiety of defending or excusing him. This supposition however being made, I feel no surprise, on surveying the majority of the persons composing evangelical communities, that this man has acquired an accumulation of prejudices against some of the distinguishing features of the gospel. Permitting himself to feel as if the circumstances which thus diminish or distort an order of christian sentiments, were inseparable from it, he is inclined to regret that there should be any divine sanctions against his framing for himself, perhaps indeed on the foundation of those principles in christianity which he cannot but admire, a more enlarged scheme of religion.

It was especially unfortunate if, while this man was attaining a high degree of mental cultivation, the senior persons, whether parents or other relatives or friends, in whose society he lived and was still regarded as a subject of *education*, inculcated religious principles in a manner so unacceptable to taste. In this case, the unavoidable frequency of intercourse, must have rendered the counteractive operation of the unpleasing circumstances associated with christian truth almost incessant. And it would naturally become continually stronger. For each repetition of that which offended his refined intellectual habits, would incite him to value and cherish them the more, and to cultivate them according to a standard still more foreign from all congeniality with his preceptors. These habits he perhaps began and continued to acquire from books of elegant sentiment or philosophical research, which he read in disregard of the advice or the injunction to read scarcely any but works specifically religious. To such studies he has again and again returned with an animated rebound from systematic common-places, whether delivered in private or in public instruction, and has felt the full contrast between the force, lustre, and mental richness, accompanying the moral speculations or poetical visions of genius, and the manner in which the truths of the gospel had been conveyed. He was not serious and honest enough to make, when in retirement, a candid effort to abstract these truths from the form in which they were thus unhappily exhibited, and try how they would appear in a better. He could easily have trans-

ferred them into this better form; or at least, if he could not, he had but a very small portion of that mental superiority, of which he was congratulating himself that his disgusts were an evidence. But his sense of the duty of doing this was perhaps less cogent, from his perceiving that the evangelical doctrines were inculcated by his relatives with no less deficiency of the means of proving them true, than of rendering them interesting; and he could easily discern that his instructors had received the articles of their faith implicitly from a class of teachers, or a religious community, without even a subsequent exercise of reasoning to confirm what they had thus adopted. They believed these articles through the habit of hearing them, and maintained them by the habit of believing them. The recoil of his feelings therefore did not alarm his conscience with the conviction of its being absolutely the truth of God, that, under this uninviting form, he was reluctant to embrace. Unaided by such a conviction already existing, and unarmed with a force of argument sufficient to impress it, the seriousness, perhaps sometimes rugged seriousness, of his friends, incessantly asserting his mind to be in a fatal condition, till he should think and feel exactly as they did, was little likely to conciliate his repugnance. When sometimes their admonitions took the mild or pathetic tone, his respect for their piety, and his gratitude for their affectionate solicitude, had perhaps a momentary effect to make him earnestly wish he could abdicate every intellectual refinement, and adopt in pious simplicity all their feelings and ideas. But

as the contracted views, the rude figures, and the mixture of systematic and illiterate language, recurred, his mind would again revolt, and compel him to say, This cannot, will not, be my mode of religion.

How much one wishes to have had the opportunity of saying to such a man, Why will you not understand that there is no necessity for this to be the *mode* of your religion? By what want of acuteness do you fail to distinguish between the mode and the essence? In the world of nature you see the same simple elements wrought into the plainest and most beautiful, into the most diminutive and the most majestic forms. So the same simple principles of christian truth may constitute the basis of a very inferior or a very noble order of ideas. The principles themselves have an invariable quality; but they were not imparted to man to be fixed in the mind as so many bare scientific propositions, each confined to one single mode of conception, without any collateral ideas, and to be always expressed in one unalterable form of words. They are placed there in order to spread out, if I might so express it, into a great multitude and diversity of ideas and feelings. These ideas and feelings, forming round the pure simple principles, will correspond, and will make those principles seem to correspond, to the meaner or more dignified intellectual rank of the mind. Why will you not perceive that the subject which takes so humble a style in its less intellectual believers, unfolds greater proportions through a gradation of larger and still larger faculties, and with facility

occupies the whole capacity of the amplest mind, in the same manner as the ocean fills a gulph as easily as a creek? Through this series it retains an identity of its essential principles, and appears progressively a nobler thing only by gaining a position for more nobly displaying itself. Why will you not follow it through this gradation, till it reach the point where it is presented in a greatness of character, to correspond with the improved state of your mind? Never fear lest the gospel should prove not sublime enough for the elevation of your thoughts! If you could attain an intellectual eminence from which you would look with pity on the rank which you at present hold, you would still find the dignity of this subject occupying your level, and rising above it. Do you doubt this? What then do you think of such minds, for instance, as those of Milton and Pascal? And by how many degrees of the intellectual scale shall yours surpass them, to authorize your feeling that to be little which they felt to be great? They were often conscious of the magnificence of christian truth filling, distending, and exceeding, their faculties, and sometimes wished for greater powers to do it justice. In their noblest contemplations, they did not feel their minds elevating the subject, but the subject elevating their minds. Now consider that their views of the gospel were, in essence, the same with those of its meanest sincere disciples; and that therefore many sentiments which, by their unhappy form, have disgusted you so much, bore a faithful though humble analogy to the ideas of these sublime

christians. Why then, while hearing such sentiments, have you not learnt the habit of darting upward, by means of this analogy, to the noblest style of the subject, instead of abandoning the subject itself in the recoil from the unfortunate mode of presenting it? Have you not cause to fear that your dislike goes deeper than the mode of its appearance? For, else, would you not anxiously seek, and rejoice to meet, the divine subject in that lustre of array, that transfiguration of aspect, by which its grandeur is thus redeemed?

I would make a solmn appeal to the understanding and the conscience of such a man. I would say to him, Is it among the excellencies of a mind of taste, that it loses, when the religion of Christ is concerned, all the value of its discrimination? Do you not absolutely know that the littleness which you see investing that religion is adventitious? Are you not certain that in hearing the discourse of such men, if indeed they were now to be found, as those that I have named, the evangelical truths would appear to you most sublime, and that they are not less noble in fact than they would appear as displayed from those minds? Even if *they* also failed, and all modern christians, without one exception, had conspired to give an unimpressive aspect to the subject of their profession, do you never read the new testament? If you do, is it in that state of susceptible seriousness, without which you will have no just perception of its character, without which you are but like an ignorant clown who, happening to look at the

heavens, perceives nothing more awful in that wilderness of suns than in the row of lamps along the streets? If you do read that book, in the better state of feeling, I have no comprehension of the mechanism of your mind, if the first perception would not be that of a simple venerable dignity, and if the second would not be that of a certain abstract undefinable magnificence, a feeling of something which, behind this simplicity, expands into a greatness beyond the compass of your mind; an impression like that with which a thoughtful man would have looked on the countenance of Newton, and would have felt a kind of mystical absorption in the attempt to comprehend the illimitable soul. When in this state of serious susceptibility have you not also perceived in the character and the manner of the first apostles of this truth, while they were declaring it, an expression of dignity, altogether different from that of other distinguished men, and much more refined and heavenly? If you examined the cause, you perceived that the dignity arose partly from their being employed as living oracles of this truth, and still more from their whole characters being pervaded by its spirit. And have you not been sometimes conscious, for a moment, that if it possessed your soul as it did theirs, it would make you one of the most elevated of all mortals? You would then display a combination of sanctity, sublime devotion, disinterestedness, superiority to external things, energy, and exulting hope, in comparison of which the ambition of a conqueror, or the pride of a self-admiring philo-

sopher, would be a very vulgar kind of dignity. You acknowledge these representations to be just; you allow that the kind of sublimity which you have sometimes perceived in the new testament, that the qualities of the apostolic spirit, and that the intellectual and moral greatness of some modern christians, express the genuine character of the evangelic religion, and therefore evince its dignity. But then, is it not most disingenuous in you to allow the meanness which you know to be but associated and separable, to be admitted by your own mind as an excuse for its alienation from what is acknowledged to be the very contrary of meanness? Ought you not to turn on yourself, with keen indignation at that want of rectitude which resigns you to the effect of these associations, or with contempt of the debility which tries in vain to break them? Is it for *you* to be offended at the mental weakness of christians, you, whose intellectual vigour, and whose sense of justice, but leave you to sink helpless in the fastidiousness of sickly taste, and to lament that so many inferior spirits have been consoled and saved by this divine faith as to make it impossible for you to embrace it, even though your own salvation depend on it? At the very same time perhaps this weakness takes the form of pride. Let that pride speak out; it would be curious to hear it say, that your mental refinement perhaps *might* have permitted you to assume your ground on the same eminence with Milton and Pascal, *if* so many humbler beings did not disgrace it, by occupying the declivity and the vale.

But after all, what need of referring to illustrious names, as if the claims of that which you acknowledge to be from heaven should be made to depend on the number of those who have received it gracefully; or as if a rational being could calmly wait for his taste to be conciliated, before he would embrace a system by which his immortal interest is to be secured? Is the difference, as declared by the Supreme Authority, between the consequences of cordially receiving or not receiving the evangelical system so small, that a solemn contemplation of it would not overwhelm you with mortification and wonder, that so subordinate a counteraction could so long have made you unjust to yourself? And if you avoid this contemplation, will therefore the difference and the ultimate loss prove less serious, because you would not exercise thought enough to anticipate it? If the consequence should prove to be inexpressibly serious, will a perversity of refinement appear a worthy cause for which to have incurred it? You deserve to be disgusted with a divine communication, and to lose all its advantages, if you can thus let every thing have a greater influence on your feelings concerning it than its truth and importance, and if its accidental and separable associations with littleness, can counteract its essential inseparable ones with the Governor and Redeemer of the world, with happiness, and with eternity. With what compassion you might be justly regarded by an illiterate but zealous christian, whose interest in the truths of the new testament at once constitutes the best felicity here, and carries him rapidly toward

the kingdom of his Father, while you are standing aloof, and perhaps thinking, that if he and all such as he were dead, you might, after a while, acquire the spirit which should impel you also toward heaven. But why do you not feel your individual concern in this great subject as absolutely as if all men were dead, and you heard alone in the earth the voice of God; or as if you saw, like the solitary exile of Patmos, an awful appearance of Jesus Christ, and the visions of hereafter? What is it to you that many christians have given an aspect of littleness to the gospel, or that a few have displayed it in majesty?

LETTER III.

ANOTHER cause which I think has tended to render evangelical religion less acceptable to persons of taste, is, the peculiarity of language adopted in the discourses and books of its teachers, as well as in the religious correspondence and conversation of christians. I do not refer to any past age, when an excessive quaintness deformed the style of composition, both on religion and all other subjects; my assertion is respecting the diction at present in use.

The works taken collectively of the best writers in the language, have created and fixed a grand standard of general phraseology. If any

department is exempted from the authority of this standard, it is the low one of humour and buffoonery, in which the writer may coin and fashion phrases according to his whim. But in the language of grave subjects, that authority is absolute. It does indeed allow indefinite varieties of what is called style, since twenty pure and able writers might be cited, who have had each a different style; but yet there is a certain general character of expression which they have all substantially concurred to establish. This compound result of all their modes of writing is become sanctioned as the classical manner of employing the language, as the form in which it constitutes the most pure general vehicle of thought. And though it is difficult to define this standard, yet a person of taste instantly feels when it is transgressed or deserted, and says very confidently—I am certain that no classical writer ever employed that phrase, or would ever have combined those words in such a manner.

Now the deviations from this standard must be, first, by a mean or vulgar diction, which is below it; or secondly, by a barbarous diction which is *out* of it, or foreign to it; or thirdly, by a diction which, though foreign to it, is yet not to be termed barbarous, because it is elevated entirely above the authority of the standard, by a super-human force or majesty of thought, or a super-human communication of truth.

I might make some charge against the language of divines under the first of these distinctions; but my present attention is to what seems to me to come under the second character of dif-

ference from the standard, that of being barbarous.—The phrases peculiar to any trade, profession, or fraternity, are barbarous, if they are not low; they are commonly both. The language of law is felt by every one to be barbarous in the extreme, not only by the huge lumber of its technical terms, but by its very structure, in such parts of it as do not consist of technical terms. The language of science is barbarous, as far as it differs arbitrarily, and in more than the use of those terms which are indispensable to the science, from the pure general model. And I am afraid that, on the same principle, the accustomed diction of evangelical religion also must be pronounced barbarous. For I suppose it will be instantly allowed, that the mode of expression of the greater number of evangelical divines* and professors is widely different from the standard of general language, not only by the necessary adoption of some peculiar terms, but by a con-

* When I say *evangelical divines*, I concur with the opinion of those, who deem a considerable, and, in an intellectual and literary view, a highly respectable class of the writers who have professedly taught christianity, to be *not* strictly evangelical. They might rather be denominated moral and philosophical divines, treating very ably on the generalities of religion, and on the christian morals, but not placing the economy of redemption exactly in that light in which the new testament appears to me to place it. Some of these have avoided the kind of dialect on which I am animadverting, not only by means of a diction more classical and dignified in the general principles of its structure, but also by avoiding the *ideas* with which the phrases of this dialect are commonly associated. I may however here observe, that it is by no means altogether confined to the specifically evangelical department of writing and discourse, though it there prevails the most, and with the greatest number of phrases. It extends, in some degree, into the majority of writings on religion in general, and may therefore be called the theological, almost as properly as the evangelical, dialect.

tinued and systematic cast of phraseology; insomuch that in reading or hearing five or six sentences of an evangelical discourse, you ascertain the school by the mere turn of expression, independently of any attention to the quality of the ideas. If, in order to try what those ideas would appear in a different form of words, you attempted to reduce a paragraph to the language employed by intellectual men in speaking or writing well on general subjects, you would find it must be absolutely a version. There is no room and no need to collect phrases and quotations; but you know how easily it could be done; and the specimens would give the idea of an attempt to create, out of the general mass of the language, a dialect which should be intrinsically spiritual, and so exclusively appropriated to christian doctrine as to be totally unserviceable for any other subject, and to become ludicrous when applied to it.* And this being extracted, like the sabbath from the common course of time, the more extensive form of diction is abandoned, with all its powers, diversities, and elegance, to secular subjects and the use of the profane. It is a kind of popery of language, requiring every thing to be marked with the signs of the holy church, and forbidding any one to minister to religion except in consecrated speech.

* This is so true, that it is no uncommon expedient with the *would be* wits, to introduce some of the spiritual phrases, in speaking of any thing which they wish to render ludicrous; and they are generally so far successful as to be rewarded by the laugh or the smile of the circle, who probably never had the privilege of hearing wit, and have not the sense or conscience to care about religion.

Supposing that a heathen foreigner had acquired a full acquaintance with our language in its most classical construction, yet without learning any thing about the gospel, (which it is true enough he might do,) and that he then happened to read or hear an evangelical discourse—he would be exceedingly surprised at the strange cast of phraseology. He would probably be more arrested and occupied by the singularity of the diction than by that of the ideas; whereas the general course of the diction should appear but the same as that to which he had been accustomed. It should be such that he would not even think of it, but only of the new subject and peculiar ideas which it should present to his view; unless there could be some advantage in the necessity of looking at these ideas through the mist and perplexity of a double medium, that of language, and that of dialect.—Or if he were not a stranger to the subject, but had acquired its leading principles from some author or speaker who employed (with the addition of a small number of terms) the same style in which he would have illustrated any other serious subject, he would still be not less surprised. "Is it possible," he would say as soon as he could apprehend what he was attending to, "that these are the very same views which lately presented themselves with such lucid simplicity to my understanding? Or is there something more, of which I am not aware, conveyed and concealed under these strange forms of phrase? Is this another stage of the religion, the school of the adepts, in which I am not yet initiated? And

does religion then every where, as well as in *my* country, affect to shew and guard its importance by relinquishing the simple language of intelligence, and assuming an obscure dialect of its own? Or is this the diction of an individual only, and of one who really intends but to convey the same ideas that I have received in so much more clear and manly a style? But then, in what remote corner, placed beyond the authority of criticism and the circulation of literature, where a most dignified language stagnates into barbarism, did this man study his religion and acquire his phrases? Or by what inconceivable perversion of taste and of labour has he framed, for the sentiments of his religion, a vehicle so uncongenial with the eloquence of his country, and so adapted to dissociate them from all connexion with that eloquence?"

My dear friend, if I were not conscious of the most solemn and cordial veneration for evangelical religion itself, I should be more afraid to trust myself in making these observations on the usual manner of expressing its ideas. If I am uncandid I am willing to be corrected. Perhaps my description of this manner exaggerates; but that there is a great and systematical difference between it and the true classical diction, is most palpably obvious, and I cannot help regarding it as an unfortunate circumstance. It gives the gospel too much the air of a professional thing, which must have its peculiar cast of phrases, for the mutual recognition of its proficients, in the same manner as other professions, arts, and mysteries, have theirs. This is officiously placing

the singularity of littleness to draw attention to the singularity of greatness, which at the same time it obscures. It is giving an uncouthness of manner to a beauty which should attract all hearts. It is teaching a provincial dialect to the rising instructor of a world. It is imposing the guise of a little formal ecclesiastic on what is destined for an universal monarch.

Would it not be an improvement in the administration of religion, whether by means of speaking or writing, if christian truth were conveyed in that uncoloured neutral vehicle of expression which is adapted indifferently to common serious subjects? But it may be made a question whether it *can* be perfectly conveyed in such language. This point therefore requires a little consideration. The diction on which I have animadverted, may be distinguished into three parts.

The first is a peculiar mode of using various common words. And this peculiarity consists partly in expressing ideas by such single words as do not simply and directly belong to them, instead of other single words which do simply and directly belong to them and in general language are used to express them; and partly in using such combinations of words as make uncouth phrases.* Now is this necessary? The answer to the question is immediately obvious as to the former part of the description; there can be no

* As for instance, *walk*, and *conversation*, instead of *conduct*, *actions*, or *deportment*; *flesh*, instead, sometimes, of *body*, sometimes, of natural inclination; and, for an example of a phrase, *a sense of divine things*, instead of *impression of religious subjects*.

need to use one common word in an affected manner to convey an idea which there is another common word at hand to express in the simplest and most usual manner. And then as to phrases, composed of an uncouth selection and combination of words which are common, and have no degree of technicality,—are they necessary? They are not absolutely necessary, unless each of them conveys a thought of so exquisitely singular a signification, that no other conjunction of terms could have expressed it; a thought which was never suggested by one mind to another till these three or four words happened to fall out of the regular order of the language into a strange phrase; a thought which cannot be expressed in the language of another country that has not a correspondent idiom; and which will vanish from the world if ever this phrase shall be forgotten. But these combinations of words have no such pretensions. They will seldom appear to express a meaning which it required such a fortunate or such a dexterous expedient to bring and to retain within the scope of our ideas. Very often their sense is of so general and common a kind, that you could easily have expressed it in five or six different forms of words. Some of these phrases would seem to have been originally the mere produce of affectation, and some to have been invented to give an appearance of particular significance to ideas which were so plain and common, that they seemed to have no force as exhibited in the ordinary cast of diction. In religion, as in other departments, artificial turns of expression have often been resorted to,

in order to relieve the obvious plainness of the thought. In whatever manner however the language was first perverted into these artificial modes, it would be easy to try whether they are become such special and privileged vehicles of thought, that no other forms of words can express what is supposed to be their sense. And it would be found that these phrases, as it is within our familiar experience that all phrases, consisting of only common words, and having no relation to art or science, can be exchanged for several different combinations of words, without materially altering the thought or lengthening the expression. I conclude then, that what I have described as the first part of the theological dialect, the peculiar mode of using common words, is not absolutely necessary as a vehicle of christian truths.

The second part of the diction consists, not in a peculiar mode of using common words, but in a class of words peculiar in themselves, as being seldom used except by divines, but of which the meaning can with perfect ease be expressed, without definition or circumlocution, by other single terms which are in general use. For example, edification, tribulation, blessedness, godliness, righteousness, carnal, lusts, (a term peculiar and theological only in the plural,) could be exchanged for parallel terms too obvious to need mentioning. It is true indeed that there are very few terms perfectly synonymous. But when there are several words of very similar though not exactly the same signification, and none of them belong to an art or science, the one

which is selected, is far more frequently used in that *general* meaning by which it is merely equivalent to the others, than in that precise shade of meaning by which it is distinguished from them. The words instruction, improvement, for instance, may not express exactly the sense of edification; but the word edification is probably not often used by a writer or speaker with any recollection of that in which its meaning differs from the meaning of improvement or instruction.—This is still more true of some other words, as, for example, tribulation and affliction. Whatever small difference of import these words may derive from their etymology, it is probable that no man *ever* wrote tribulation rather than affliction *on account* of that difference. If, in addition to these two, the word distress has occurred to the mind, the selection of any one from the three has perhaps always been determined by habit, or accident, rather than by any perception of a distinct signification. The same remark will, in a great measure, apply to the words blessed, happy, righteous, holy, just, good, carnal, sensual, and a multitude of others. So that though there are few words, in strict truth, synonymous, yet there are very many which are so in *effect*, even by the allowance and sanction of the most rigid laws to which the best writers have conformed their composition. Perhaps this is a defect in human thinking: perhaps every conception ought to be so exquisitely discriminative and precise, that no two words, which have the most refined shade of difference in their meaning, should be equally and indifferently eligible to express that concep-

tion. But what writer or speaker will ever exemplify such perfection? If a divine felt that he had this extreme discrimination of thought, and that he meant something clearly different by the words, carnal, godly, edifying, and so of many others, from what he could express by the words, sensual, pious, instructive, he would certainly do right to adhere to the more peculiar words; but if he does not, he may perhaps improve the vehicle, without hurting the material, of his religious communications, by adopting the general and classical mode of expression.

The third distinction of the theological dialect, consists in words almost peculiar to the language of divines, and for which equivalent terms *cannot* be found, except in the form of definition or circumlocution. Sanctification, grace, covenant, salvation, and a few more, may be assigned to this class. These may be called, in a qualified sense, the technical terms of evangelical religion. Now, separately from any religious considerations, it is plainly necessary, in a literary view, that all those terms that express a modification of thought which there are no other words competent to express, without great circumlocution, should be retained. They are requisite to the perfection of the language. And then, in considering those terms as connected with the christian truth I am ready to admit, that it will be of advantage to that truth, for some of those peculiar modes of thought of which it partly consists, to be permanently denominated by certain peculiar words, which shall stand as its technical

terms.* But here several thoughts suggest themselves.

First, The definitions of some of these christian terms are not absolute and unquestionable. The words have assumed the specific formality of technical terms, without having completely the quality and value of such terms. A certain laxity in their sense renders them of far less use in their department, than the terms of science, especially of mathematical science, are in theirs. Technical terms have been the lights of science, but, in many instances, the shades of religion. It is most unfortunate, when, in disquisitions or instructions, the grand leading words on which the force of all the rest depends, have not a precise and indisputable signification. The effect is similar to that which takes place in the ranks of an army, when an officer has a doubtful opinion, or gives indistinct orders. What I would infer from these observations, is, that a christian writer or speaker will occasionally do well, instead of using the peculiar term, to express at length in other words, at the expense of much circumlocution, that idea which he would have wished to convey if he had used that peculiar term. I do not mean that he should do this so often as to render the term obsolete. It might be useful sometimes, especially in verbal instruction, both to introduce the term, and to give such a sentence as I have described. Such an expletive

*It is proper here to mention, that I am indebted to a most acute critic on the first edition, for a modification of several of the opinions expressed in this essay.

repetition of the idea will more than compensate for the tediousness by the clearness.*

Secondly, If the definitions of the christian peculiar terms were even as precise and fixed as those of scientific denominations, yet the nature of the subject is such as to permit an indolent mind to pronounce or to hear them, without recollecting those definitions. In speaking or writing, and in hearing or reading, a mathematical lecture, both the teacher and the pupil are compelled to form in their minds the exact idea which each technical term has been defined to signify; else the whole train of words is mere sound and inanity. But in religion, a man has a feeling of having some general ideas connected with all the words as he hears them, though he perhaps never studied, or does not retain, the definition of one. I shall have occasion to repeat this remark, and therefore do not enlarge here. My inference is the same as under the former observation, that the technical terms of christianity will contribute little to precision of thought, unless the ideas which they signify, are often expressed at length in other words, either in explanation of those terms when introduced, or in substitution for them when omitted.

Thirdly, It is not in the power of single theological terms, however precise their definitions may at any time have been, to secure to their respective ideas an unalterable stability. Unless the ideas themselves, by being often expressed

* It is needless to observe, that this would be a superfluous labour with respect to the most simple of the peculiar words, such for instance as *salvation*,

Now such an alteration would bring the language of divines nearly to the classical standard. If evangelical sentiments could be faithfully presented in an order of words of which so small a part should belong exclusively to those sentiments, they could be presented in what should be substantially the diction of Addison or Pope. And if even Shaftsbury, Bolingbroke, and Hume, could have become christians by some mighty and sudden efficacy of conviction, and had determined to write thenceforth in the spirit of the Apostles, they would have found, if these observations are correct, no radical change necessary in the structure of their language. An enlightened professor of christianity might have been sorry, if, in such a case, he had seen them superstitiously labouring to acquire all the phrases of a school, instead of applying at once to its new and its noblest use a diction fitted for the vehicle of universal thought.* Are not *they* yet sufficient masters of language, it might have been asked with surprise, to express all their thoughts with the utmost precision? As their language had been found sufficiently specific to injure the gospel, it would have been strange if it had been too general to serve it. The required alteration would probably have been little more than to introduce familiarly the obvious denominations of the christian topics and objects, such as, redemption, heaven, mediator, Christ, redeemer, with the others of a similar kind, and a few of those

* I hope the anachronism which may seem to be involved in this manner of referring collectively to men who were not contemporary, will be forgiven.

almost technical words which I have admitted to be indispensable. The habitual use of such denominations would have left the general order of their composition the same. And it would have been striking to observe by how small a difference of terms a diction which had appeared most perfectly pagan, could be christianized, when the writer had turned to christian subjects, and felt the christian spirit.—On the whole then, I conclude that, with the exception which I have distinctly made, the evangelical principles may be clearly exhibited in what I have ventured to call a neutral diction. And if they may, I can imagine some reasons to justify the wish that it had been more generally employed.

Perhaps it will hardly be permitted me to repeat as one of these reasons, the consideration of the impression made by the style which I have described, on those persons of cultivated taste whom this essay has chiefly in view. I am aware that they are greatly inclined to make an idol of their taste; and I am aware also that no species of irreligion can be much more detestable than to sacrifice to this idol any thing which essentially belongs to christianity. If any part of evangelical religion, separately from all injurious associations, were of a nature to displease a finished taste, the duty would evidently be to repress its claims and murmurs. We should dread the presumption which would require of the Deity that his spiritual economy should be, both in fact and in a manner obvious to our view, subjected or correspondent in all parts to those laws of order and beauty which we have learnt partly from

the relations of the material world, and partly from the arbitrary institutions and habits of society. But, at the same time, it is a most unwise policy for religion, that the sacrifice of taste which ought, if required, to be submissively made to any part of either its essence or its form as really displayed from heaven, should be exacted to any thing unnecessarily and ungracefully superinduced by men.

As another reason, I would observe, that the disciples of the religion of Christ would wish it to mingle more extensively and familiarly with social converse, and all the serious subjects of human attention. But then it should have every facility, that would not compromise its genuine character, for doing so. And a peculiar phraseology is the direct contrary of such facility, as it gives to what is already by its own nature eminently distinguished from common subjects, an artificial strangeness, which makes it difficult for discourse to slide into it, and revert to it and from it, without a formal and ungraceful transition. The subject is placed in a condition like that of an entire foreigner in company, who is debarred from taking any share in the conversation, till some one interrupts it by turning directly to him, and beginning to talk with him in the foreign language. You have sometimes observed, when a person has introduced religious topics, in the course of a perhaps tolerably rational conversation on other interesting subjects, that, owing to the cast of expression, fully as much as to the difference of the subject, it was done by an entire change of the whole tenour

and bearings of the discourse, and with as formal an announcement as the bell ringing to church. Had his religious diction been more of a piece with the common train of sensible language, he might perhaps have introduced the subject sooner, and certainly with a much better effect.

A third consideration, is, that evangelical sentiments would probably be less subject to the imputation of fanaticism, if their language were less contrasted with that of other classes of sentiments. Here I hope it may be unnecessary to say, that I deem no pusillanimity more contemptible than that which, to escape this imputation, would surrender the smallest vital particle of the religion of Christ. No one has a more solemn recollection of his declaration, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him also shall the son of man be ashamed." Any form, and every form, of speech, which could not be superseded without precluding some idea peculiar to the gospel from the possibility of being easily and most faithfully expressed, I would retain, in spite of all the ridicule of the most antichristian age. But I am, at every step, supposing that every part of the evangelical system can be most perfectly exhibited in a diction but little peculiar; and, that being admitted, would it not be better to avert the imputation, as far as this difference of language could avert it? Better, I do not mean on account of the convenience of the man who is called a fanatic for maintaining the evangelical principles; he ought, on the ground both of

christian fidelity and of manly independence; to be superior to caring about the charge; but better, as to the light in which these principles might appear to the persons who are inclined to make this imputation. You may have observed that in attributing fanaticism, they often fix on the phrases, more than on the absolute substance, of evangelical doctrines. Now would it not be better to shew them what these doctrines are, as divested of these phrases, and exhibited clearly in that vehicle in which other important truths are presented, and thus, at least, to repress their scorn? If sometimes their approbation might be gained, it were a still more desirable effect. And we can recollect instances in which a certain degree of this good effect has resulted. Persons who had received unfavourable impressions of some of the peculiar ideas of the gospel, from having heard them advanced almost exclusively in the modes of phrase on which I have remarked, have acknowledged their prejudices to be diminished, after these ideas had been presented in the simple general language of intellect. We cannot indeed so far forget the lessons of experience, and the inspired declarations concerning the dispositions of the human mind, as to expect that any improvement in the mode of exhibiting christian truth will render it irresistible. But it were to be wished that every thing should be done to bring reluctant minds into some degree of doubt, at least, whether, if they cannot be evangelical, it is because they are too rational.

As a further consideration in favour of adopting a more general language, it may be observed, that hypocrisy would then find a much greater difficulty, as far as speech is concerned, in supporting its imposture. The usual language of hypocrisy, at least of vulgar hypocrisy, is cant; and religious cant is often an affected use of the phrases which have been heard employed as appropriate to evangelical truth; with which phrases the hypocrite has connected no distinct ideas, so that he would be utterly confounded, if a sensible examiner were to require an accurate explanation of them; while yet nothing is more easy to be sung or said. Now were this diction, for the greater part, to vanish from christian society, leaving the truth in its mere essence behind, and were, consequently, the pretender reduced to assume the guise of religion on the wide and laborious plan of possessing himself of all its chief ideas, so as to be able to assign them discriminatively in language of his own; the part of a hypocrite would be much less easily acted, and less frequently attempted. Religion would therefore be seldomer dishonoured by a vile resemblance.

Again, if this alteration of language were introduced, some of the sincere disciples of evangelical religion would much more distinctly feel the necessity of a clear intellectual hold on the principles of their profession. A systematic recurring formality of words tends to prevent a perfect understanding of the subject, by furnishing for complex ideas a set of ready framed signs, (like stereotype in printing,) which a man

learns to employ without really having the combinations of thought of which those ideas consist. Some of the simple ideas which belong to the combination, may be totally absent from his mind, the others may be most faintly apprehended; no precise assemblage is therefore formed; and thus the sign which he employs, stands in fact for nothing. If, on hearing one of these phrases, you were suddenly to turn to the speaker, and say, Now what *is* that idea? What do you precisely mean by that expression? You would often find with how indistinct a conception, with how little attention to the very idea itself, if I might so express it, the mind had been contented. And this contentment you would often observe to be, not a humble acquiescence in some abstruse principle of which a man feels and confesses the difficulty of forming more than a partial conception, but the satisfied persuasion that he fully understands what he is expressing. On another subject, where there were no settled forms of words to beguile him into the feeling, as if he thought and understood, when in fact he did not, and where words must have been selected to define his own apprehension of the thought, his embarrassment how to express himself would have made him conscious of the indistinctness of his conception, and have compelled an intellectual effort. But it is against all justice, that christian truths should be believed and professed, with a less concern for precision, and at the expense of less mental exercise, than any other subject would require. And of how little consequence it would

seem to be, in *this* mode of believing, whether a man entertains one system of principles, or the very opposite system.

But if several of these arguments could not be alleged, or if they are not fairly alleged, it would still seem far from desirable, without evident necessity, to clothe evangelical sentiment in a diction varying in more than a few indispensable terms from the general standard, for the simple reason, that it must be barbarous; unless, as I have observed, it be raised quite above the authority of this standard, and of the criticism and the taste which appeal to it, by the majesty of inspiration which we have no more to expect, or by the imperial tone of a genius almost transcending human nature. I do not know whether it is absolutely impossible that there should arise a man whose manner of thinking shall be so incomparably original and sublime, as to authorize him to throw the language into a new order, all his own; but it is doubtful whether there ever appeared such a writer, in any language which had been cultivated to its maturity. Even Milton, who might, if ever mortal might, be warranted to sport with all established authorities, and to seize at will every unsanctioned mode of expression into which uncontrolable genius could stray, is, notwithstanding, for having presumed in a certain degree to create for himself a peculiar diction, censured by Johnson as having written in a "Babylonish dialect." And Johnson's own mighty force of mind has not saved his peculiar structure of language from being condemned, I believe, by all men of

taste. The magic of Burke's eloquence is not enough to preclude the feeling, that it would have been much more perfect, had the same marvellous affluence of thought been expressed in a language of less arbitrary and capricious construction. No more have the most distinguished evangelical divines, who have adhered to the spiritual dialect, impressed on it either a dignity to overawe literary taste, or a grace to conciliate it. Nor does it, with me, derive any sanction from being not the language of an individual only, but of a numerous and pious class; nor from its long established use; nor yet from the pre-eminence of its subject, since I think that subject suffers in its dignity of appearance by being presented in this vehicle.

LETTER IV.

In defence of the diction which I have been describing, it will be said, that it has grown out of the language of the bible. To a great extent this is evidently true. Many phrases indeed which casually occurred in the writings of divines, and many which were laboriously invented by those who wished to give to divinity a complete systematic arrangement, and therefore wanted denominations or titles for the multitude of articles in the artificial distribution, have been naturalized into the theological dialect. But a

large proportion of its phrases consists partly in such combinations of words as were taken originally from the bible, and much more in such as have been made in an intentional resemblance of the characteristic language of that book.

Before I make any further remarks, I do not know whether it may be necessary, in order to prevent the possibility of misapprehension, to advert to the high advantage and propriety of often introducing sentences from the bible; not only in theological, but in all grave moral composition. This is so obvious, if we believe in the divine authority of the scriptures, that a writer incurs the hazard of appearing foolish in saying that he approves such an introduction of sacred expressions. There can be no need for me to repeat, what has been repeated innumerable times, that passages of the inspired writings must necessarily be cited, in some instances, in proof of the truth of opinions, and may be most happily cited, in many others, to give a venerable and impressive air to serious sentiments which would be admitted without a formal reference to authority. Both complete sentences, and striking short expressions, consisting perhaps sometimes of only two or three words, may be thus introduced with an effect at once useful and ornamental, while they appear pure and unmodified amidst the composition, as simple particles of scripture, quite distinct from the diction of the writer who inserts them. When thus appearing in their own genuine quality, as lines or parts of lines taken from a venerable book which is written in a manner very different

from our common model of language, they continue to be of a piece with that book. They are read as expressions foreign to the surrounding composition, and, without an effort, referred to the work from which they are brought; in the same manner as passages, or striking short expressions, adopted from some respeted and well known classic in our language. Whatever dignity therefore characterises the great work itself, is possessed also by these detached pieces in the various places where they are inserted. And if they are judiciously inserted, they impart their dignity to the sentiments which they are employed to enforce. This employment of the sacred expressions may be very frequent, as the bible contains such an imense variety of ideas, applicable to all interesting subjects. And from its being so familiarly known, its sentences or shorter expressions may be introduced without the smallest formality of noticing, either by words or any other mark, from what volume they are drawn.—These observations are more than enough to express my veneration for the bible, and my perception of the dignity and force which may be derived from a judicious introduction of its language.

It is a different mode of using biblical language, that constitutes so considerable a part of the dialect which I have ventured to disapprove. When extracts from the bible are introduced in the manner just now described, the composition comprehends two kinds of language; each of them pure and perfectly conformed to its own standard. The much larger proportion of the

thoughts is expressed, as a matter of course, in the one of these modes of language, which is simply that of the author. In this part the reader proceeds with facility, as the ideas are presented in the usual and general vehicle of thought, only with now and then a peculiar theological term; and when he comes to the expressions inserted from the bible, as he meets them also pure and perfect in their kind, he involuntarily assumes, for the moment, that mode of apprehension with which he reads the bible itself, and these small extracts strike him in the same manner as if he had just then met them in the sacred page. This prevents any confusion in his mind. But in the theological dialect, that part of the phraseology which has a biblical cast, is neither the one of these two kinds of language nor the other, but an inseparable mixture of both. For the expressions resembling those of scripture are blended and moulded into the very substance of the diction. I say *resembling*; for though some of them are precisely phrases from the bible, yet most of them are phrases a little modified from the form in which they occur in the sacred book, by changing or adding a word, by giving an artificial turn to the beginning or the end, or by compounding two phrases into one. There are also, as I have already observed, many forms of expression cast in imitation of the biblical, by taking some one word almost peculiar to the bible, and connecting it with one, or with several, of the common words, in a very peculiar construction separately from which it is seldom introduced. In this manner the scriptural expressions,

instead of appearing as shining points on a darker ground, as gems advantageously set in an inferior substance, are reduced to become a constituent part of the dialect, in which they lose their genuine quality and their lustre. They are not brought, in each single instance, directly from the scriptures by the distinct selection of the person who uses them, but merely recur to him in the common usage of the diction, and generally without a recollection of their sacred origin. They are habitually employed by the school of divines, and therefore are now, in no degree, of the nature of quotations introduced for their special appositeness in particular instances, as the expressions of a venerable human author would be repeated.

This is the kind of biblical phraseology which I could wish to see less employed,—unless it is either more venerable or more lucid than that which I have recommended. We may be allowed to doubt how far such a cast of language can be venerable, after considering, that it gives not the smallest assurance of striking or elevated thought, since in fact a great quantity of most inferior writing has appeared in this kind of diction; that it is not *now* actually learnt from familiarity with the scriptures; that the incessant repetition of its phrases in every kind of religious exercise and performance wears out any solemnity it might ever have had; and that it is the very usual concomitant of a too systematic and cramped manner of thinking. It may be considered also, that phrases of whatever quality or high origin, if they do not stand separate in the com-

position, but are made essentially of a piece with the dialect, take, in point of dignity, the quality of that dialect, so that if the whole of it is not dignified, the particular part is not: if the whole character of the peculiar language of divines is not adapted to excite veneration, that proportion of it which has been formed out of the scripture-phraseology, is not adapted to excite it. And again, let it be considered, that in almost all cases, an attempt to imitate the peculiarity of form in which a venerable object is presented, instead of being content to aim at a coincidence of general qualities, not only fails to excite veneration, but excites the contrary sentiment; especially when all things in the form of the venerable model are homogeneous, while the imitation exhibits some features of resemblance incongruously combined with what is mainly and unavoidably of a different cast. A grand ancient edifice, of whatever order, or if it were of an order of its own, would be an impressive object; but a modern little one raised in its neighbourhood, in a style of building substantially of the most vulgar kind, but with a number of antique windows and angles in imitation of the grand structure, would be a grotesque and ridiculous one.

Scriptural phrases then can no longer make a solemn impression, when modified and vulgarized into the texture of a language which, taken all together, is the reverse of every thing that can either attract or command. Such idioms may indeed remind one of prophets and apostles, but it is a recollection which prompts to say, Who are these men that, instead of seriously introducing

at intervals the direct words of those revered dictators of truth, seem to be mocking the sacred language by a barbarous imitative diction of their own? They may affect the forms of a divine solemnity, but there is no fire from heaven. They may shew something like a burning bush, but it is without an angel.

As to perspicuity, it will not be made a question whether that is one of the recommendations of this corrupt modification of the biblical phraseology. Without our leave, the mode of expression habitually associated with the general exercise of our intelligence, conveys ideas to us the most easily and the most clearly. And not unfrequently even in citing the pure expressions of scripture, especially in doctrinal subjects, a religious instructor will find it indispensable to add a sentence in order to exhibit the sense in a more obvious manner.

If it should be feared that the use of a language with which the biblical prases are not in this manner blended, might have a tendency to make the reader or hearer forget the bible, or recollect it only as an antiquated book, I would observe, that a devout man, in illustrating religious subjects, will too often introduce the pure unmodified expressions of that book to admit any danger of its being forgotten. And I would suggest, that though these should occur much seldomer in the course of his sentences than the half-scriptural phrases are repeated in that diction on which I have remarked, they would probably remind us of the bible in a more advantageous manner than a dialect which has lost the

dignity of a sacred language without acquiring the grace of a classical one. I am sensible in how many points the illustration would not apply, but it would partly answer my purpose to observe, that if it were wished to promote the study of some venerated human author, suppose Hooker, the way would not be to attempt incorporating a great number of his turns of expression into the essential structure of our own diction, which would generally have an uncouth effect, but to make respectful references, and often to insert in our composition sentences, and parts of sentences, distinctly *as his*.

Let the oracles of inspiration be cited continually, both as authority and illustration, in a manner that shall make the mind instantly refer each expression that is introduced, to the venerable book from which it is taken; but let *our* part of religious language be simply ours, and let those oracles retain their characteristic form of expression unimitated to the end of time.*

* In the above remarks, I have not made any distinction between the sacred books in their own language, and as translated. It might not however be improper to notice, that though there is a great peculiarity of manner in the original scriptures, yet a certain small proportion of the phraseology which appears in the translated scriptures, does not belong to the essential structure of the original composition, but is to be ascribed to the state of the language at the time when the translation was made. A translation, therefore, made now, and conformed to the present mature state of the language, in the same degree in which the earlier translation was conformed to the state of the language at that time, would make a small alteration in some parts of that phraseology which the theological dialect has attempted to incorporate and imitate. If therefore it *were* the duty of divines to take the biblical mode of expression for their model, it would still be quite a work of supererogation, to take this model in a wider degree of difference from the ordinary language of serious thought than as it would appear in such a later version. This would be a

An advocate for the theological diction, who should not maintain its necessity or utility on the ground that a considerable proportion of it has grown out of the language of scripture, may think it has become necessary in consequence of so many people having been so long accustomed to it. I cannot but be aware that many respectable teachers of christianity, both in speaking and writing, are so habituated to put their ideas in this cast of phraseology, that it would cost them a very great effort to make any material change. Nor could they acquire, if the change were attempted, a happy command of a more

homage, not to the real diction of the sacred scriptures, but to the earlier cast of our own language. At the same time, it must be admitted, both that the change of expression which a later version might, on merely philological principles, be justified, by the progress and present standard of our language, for making, would not be great; and that every sentiment of prudence and devotional taste forbids to make quite so much alteration as those principles might warrant. All who have long venerated the scriptures in their somewhat antique version, would protest against their being laboriosly modernised into every nice conformity with the present standard of the language, and against any other than a very literal translation. If it could be supposed that our language had not yet attained a fixed state, but that it would progressively change for ages to come, it would be desirable that the translation of the bible should always continue, except in what might essentially affect the sense, a century or two behind, for the sake of that venerable air which a degree of antiquity confers on the form of that which is in its substance so eminently sacred. But I cannot allow that the same law is to be extended to the language of divines. *They* have no right to assume the same ground and the same distinctions as the bible; they ought not to affect to keep it company. There is no solemn dignity in their writings, which can claim to be invested with a venerable peculiarity. Imitate the bible or not, their composition is merely of the ordinary human quality, and subject to the same rules as that of their contemporaries who write on other subjects. And if they remain behind the advanced state of the classical diction, those contemporaries will not allow them to excuse themselves by pretending to identify themselves with the bible.

general language, without being intimately conversant with good writers on general subjects, and carefully observant of their manner of composition. Unless therefore this study has been cultivated, or is intended to be cultivated, it will perhaps be better to adhere to the accustomed mode of expression with all disadvantages.—Younger theological students, however, are supposed to be introduced to those authors who have displayed the utmost extent and powers of language in its freest form; and it may not be amiss for them to be told that evangelical ideas would incur no necessary corruption or profanation by being sometimes conveyed in such a free and lucid diction.—With regard also to a considerable proportion of christian readers and hearers, I am sensible that a reformed language would be excessively strange to them. But may I not allege, without any affectation of paradox, that its being so strange to them would be almost a proof of the necessity of adopting it, at least in part, and by degrees? For the manner in which some of them would receive this altered diction, would prove that the customary phraseology had scarcely given them any clear ideas. It would be found, as I have observed before, that the peculiar phrases had been, not so much the vehicles of ideas, as the substitutes for them. These hearers and readers have been accustomed to chime to the sound without apprehending the sense; insomuch that if they hear the very ideas which these phrases signify, or did signify, expressed ever so simply in other language, they do not recognise them, and are

instantly on the alert with the epithets, sound, orthodox, and all the watch-words of ecclesiastical suspicion. For such christians, the diction is the convenient asylum of ignorance, indolence, and prejudice.

But I have enlarged far beyond my intention, which was only to represent, with a short illustration, that this peculiarity is unfavourable to a cordial reception of evangelical doctrines in minds of cultivated taste. This I know to be a fact from many observations in real life, especially among intellectual young persons, not altogether averse to serious subjects, nor inclined to listen to the cavils against the divine authority of christianity itself.

After dismissing the consideration of the peculiar diction of divines, I meant to have taken a somewhat more general view of the accumulation of bad writing, under which the evangelical theology has been buried, and which has contributed to render its principles less welcome to persons of accomplished mental habits. A large proportion of that writing may be called bad, on more accounts than merely the theological peculiarity of expression. But it is an invidious topic, and I shall make only a few observations.

The proofs of an intellect superior in some small degree at least to the common level, accompanied by a moderate share of elegance and of correctness, are requisite to even the lowest form of what can be deemed good writing by cultivated and critical readers. It must have either these combined qualities, or an extraordinary measure of one of them: superlatively strong

sense will denominate a performance excellent, or at least, able writing, in the absence of all the graces, and notwithstanding a considerable degree of incorrectness. Below this pitch of single or combined quality, a book cannot, in a literary view, please, though its subject be the most interesting on earth; and for acceptance, therefore, the subject is unfortunate in coming to those persons in that book. A disgusting cup will spoil the finest element which can be conveyed in it, though that were the nectar of immortality.

Now, in this view, I suppose it will be acknowledged that the evangelical cause has not, on the whole, been happy in its prodigious list of authors. A number of them have displayed a high order of excellence; but one regrets as to a much greater number, that they did not revere the dignity of their religion too much to beset and suffocate it with their superfluous offerings. To you I do not need to expatiate on the character of the collective christian library. It will have been obvious to you that a great many books form the perfect vulgar of pious authorship, an assemblage of the most subordinate materials that can be called thought, in language too grovelling to be called style. Some of these writers seem to have concluded that the greatness of the *subject* was to do every thing, and that they had but to pronounce, like David, the name of "the Lord of Hosts," to give pebbles a force as formidable as that of darts or spears. Others appear to have really wanted the perception of any great difference, in point of excellence, between

the meaner and nobler modes of writing. If they had read alternately Barrow's pages and their own, they probably would not have been sensible of the superiority of his. A number of them, citing, in a perverted sense, the language of St. Paul, "not with excellency of speech," "not with enticing words of man's wisdom," "not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth," expressly disclaim every thing that belongs to fine writing, not as what they could not have exhibited or attained, but as what they judge incompatible with the simplicity of evangelical truth and intentions. In the books of each of these classes you are mortified to see how low religious thought and expression *can* sink; and you almost wonder how it was possible for the noblest ideas that are known to the sublimest intelligences in the universe, the ideas of God, of providence, of redemption, of eternity, to come into a serious human mind without imparting some small occasional degree of dignity to the train of thought. The indulgent feelings which you entertain for the intellectual and literary deficiency of humble christians in their religious communications in private, is with difficulty extended to those who make for their thoughts this demand on public attention: it was necessary for them to be christians, but what made it their duty to become authors? Many of the books are indeed successively ceasing, with the progress of time, to be read or known; but the new supply continually brought forth is so numerous, that a person who turns his attention to religious reading, is certain to meet a variety of them. Now

only suppose a man who has been conversant and enchanted with the works of eloquence, refined taste, or strong reasoning, to meet a number of these books in the outset of his more serious inquiries; in what light would the religion of Christ appear to him, if he did not find some happier delineations of it?

There is another large class of christian books, which bear the marks of learning, correctness, and a disciplined understanding, and by a general propriety leave but little to be censured, but which display no invention, no prominence of thought, nor living vigour of expression: all is flat and dry as a plain of sand. It is perhaps the iteration of common-places, the listless attention to which is hardly an action of the mind; you seem to understand it all, and mechanically assent while you are thinking of something else.—Though the author has a rich immeasurable field of possible varieties of reflection and illustration around him, he seems doomed to tread over again the narrow space of ground long since trodden to dust, and in all his movements appears clothed in sheets of lead.

There is a smaller class that might be called mock-eloquent writers. These saw the effect of brilliant expression in those works of eloquence and poetry where it was dictated and animated by energy of thought, and very reasonably wished that christian sentiments might assume a language as impressive as any subject ever employed to fascinate or command. But unfortunately they forgot that eloquence resides essentially in the thought, and that no words can make that

eloquent, which will not be so in the plainest that could clearly express the sense. Or probably they were quite confident of the excellence of their thoughts. Perhaps they concluded them to be vigorous and sublime from the very circumstance that they refused to be expressed in plain language. The writers would be but little inclined to suspect of poverty or feebleness the thoughts which seemed so naturally to be assuming, in their minds and on their page, such a magnificent style. A gaudy verbosity is always eloquence in the opinion of him that writes it; but what is the effect on the reader? Real eloquence strikes on your mind with irresistible force, and leaves you not the possibility of asking or thinking whether it *be* eloquence; but the sounding sentences of these writers leave you cool enough to examine with doubtful curiosity a language that seems threatening to move or astonish you, without actually doing it. It is something like the case of a false alarm of thunder; where a sober man, that is not apt to startle at sounds, looks out to see whether it be not the rumbling of a cart. Very much at your ease, you contrast the pomp of the expression with the quality of the thoughts, and then read on for amusement, or cease to read from disgust. In a serious hour indeed, the feeling of being amused, is prevented by the regret that it should be possible for an ill-judged style of writing to bring the most important subjects in danger of something worse than failing to interest. The unpleasing effect which it has on your own mind, will lead you to apprehend its having a very injurious one on many others.

A principal device in the fabrication of this style, is, to multiply epithets, dry epithets, laid on the outside, and into which none of the vitality of the sentiment is found to circulate. You may take a great number of the words out of each page, and find that the sense is neither more nor less for your having cleared the composition of these epithets of chalk, of various colours, with which the tame thoughts had submitted to be rubbed over in order to be made fine.

Under the denomination of mock-eloquence may also be placed the mode of writing which endeavours to excite the passions, not by presenting striking ideas of the object of passion, but by the appearance of an emphatical enunciation of the writer's own feelings concerning it. You are not made to perceive how the thing itself has the most interesting claims on your heart; but you are required to be affected in mere sympathy with the author, who attempts your feelings by frequent exclamations, and perhaps by an incessant application to his fellow-mortals, or to their Redeemer, of all the appellations and epithets of passion, and sometimes of a kind of passion not appropriate to the object. To this last great Object, especially, such forms of expression are occasionally applied, as must revolt a man, who feels that he cannot meet the same being at once on terms of adoration and of caressing equality.

It would be going beyond my purpose, to carry my remarks from the literary merits, to the moral and theological characteristics, of christian books; else a very strange account could be given of the injuries which the gospel has suffer-

ed from its friends. You might often meet with a systematic writer, in whose hands the whole wealth, and variety, and magnificence, of revelation, shrink into a meagre list of doctrinal points, and who will let no verse in the bible say a syllable till it has placed itself under one of them. You may meet with a christian polemic, who seems to value the arguments for evangelical truth, as an assassin values his dagger, and for the same reason; with a descanter on the invisible world, who makes you think of a popish cathedral, and from the vulgarity of whose illuminations you are excessively glad to escape into the solemn twilight of faith; or with a grim zealot for a theory of the Divine Attributes, which seems to delight in representing the Deity as a dreadful King of furies, whose dominion is overshadowed with vengeance, whose music is the cries of victims, and whose glory requires to be illustrated by the ruin of his creation.

It is quite unnecessary to say, that the list of excellent christian writers would be very considerable. But as to the vast mass of books that would, by the consenting adjudgment of all men of liberal cultivation, remain, after this deduction, one cannot help deploring the effect which they must have had on unknown thousands of readers. It would seem beyond all question, that books which, though even asserting the essential truths of christianity, yet utterly preclude the full impression of its character, which exhibit its claims on admiration and affection with insipid feebleness of sentiment, or which cramp its simple majesty into an artificial form at once distorted

and mean, must be seriously prejudicial to the influence of this sacred subject, though it be admitted that many of them have sometimes imparted a measure of instruction and a measure of consolation. This they might do, and yet convey very contracted and inadequate ideas of the subject at the same time*. There are a great many of them into which an intelligent christian cannot look without rejoicing that *they* were not the books, or not alone the books from which he received his impressions of the glory of his religion. There are many which nothing would induce him, even though he do not materially differ from them in the leading articles of his belief, to put into the hands of an inquiring young person; which he would be sorry and ashamed to see on the table of an infidel; and some of which he regrets to think may still contribute to keep down the standard of religious taste, if I may so express it, among the public instructors of mankind. On the whole, it would appear, that a profound veneration for christianity would induce the wish, that, after a judicious selection of books had been made, the Christians also had their Caliph Omar, and their general Amrou.

* It is true enough that on every other subject, on which a multitude of books have been written, there must have been many which in a literary sense were bad. But I cannot help thinking that the number coming under this description, bear a larger proportion to the excellent ones in the religious department than in any other. One chief cause of this has been, the mistake by which many good men professionally employed in religion, have deemed their respectable mental competence to the office of public speaking, the proof of an equal competence to a work, which is subjected to much severer literary and intellectual laws.

LETTER V.

THE causes which I have thus far considered, are associated immediately with the *object*, and, by misrepresenting it, render it less acceptable to refined taste; but there are other causes, which operate by perverting the very principles of this taste itself, so as to make it dislike the religion of Christ, even if presented in its own full and genuine character, cleared of all these associations. I shall remark chiefly on one of these causes.

I fear it is incontrovertible, that far the greatest part of what is termed polite literature, by familiarity with which taste is refined, and the moral sentiments are in a great measure formed, is hostile to the religion of Christ; partly, by introducing insensibly a certain order of opinions unconsonant, or at least not identical, with the principles of that religion; and still more, by training the feelings to a habit alien from its spirit. And in this assertion, I do not refer to writers obviously irreligious, who have laboured and intended to seduce the passions into vice, or the judgment into the rejection of divine truth; but to the general assemblage of those elegant and ingenious authors who are read and admired by the christian world, held essential to a liberal education and to the progressive accomplishment of the mind in subsequent life, and studied often without an apprehension, or even a thought, of their injuring the views and temper of spirits advancing, with the new testament for their chief instructor and guide, into another world.

It is *modern* literature that I have more particularly in view; at the same time, it is obvious that the writings of heathen antiquity have continued to operate till now with their own proper influence, that is, a correctly heathenish influence, in the very sight and presence of christianity, on the minds of many who have admitted the truth of that religion. This is just as if an eloquent pagan priest had been allowed constantly to accompany our Lord in his ministry, and had divided with him the attention and interest of his disciples, counteracting, of course, as far as his efforts were successful, the doctrine and spirit of the Teacher from heaven*.

The few observations which the subject may require to be made on ancient literature, will be directed chiefly to one part of it. For it will be allowed, that the purely speculative part† of

* It is however no part of my object in these letters to remark on the influence, in modern times, of the fabulous deities that infested the ancient works of genius. That influence is at the present time, I should think, extremely small, from the fables being so stale: all readers are sufficiently tired of Jupiter, Apollo, Minerva, and the rest. So long however as they could be of the smallest service, they were piously retained by the christian poets of this and other countries, who are now under the necessity of seeking out for some other mythology, the northern or the eastern, to support the languishing spirit of poetry. Even the ugly pieces of wood, worshipped in the South Sea islands, will probably at last receive names that may more commodiously hitch into verse, and will be invoked to adorn and sanctify the belles lettres of the next century. The poet has no reason to fear that the supply of gods may fail; it is at the same time a pity, one thinks, that a creature so immense should have been placed in a world so small as this, where all nature, all history, all morals, all true religion, and the whole resources of innocent fiction, are too little to furnish materials enough for the wants and labours of his genius.

† I do not know whether it is necessary to say that I do not include political philosophy in this description.

that literature has in a great measure ceased to interfere with the intellectual discipline of modern times. It obtains too little attention, and too little deference, to contribute much toward fixing the mind in those habits of thought and feeling which prevent the cordial admission of the doctrines and spirit of the gospel. Several learned and fanatical devotees to antiquity and paganism, have indeed made some effort to recall the long departed veneration for the dreams and subtleties of ancient philosophy. But they might, with perhaps a better prospect of success, recommend the building of temples or a pantheon, and the revival of all the institutions of idolatrous worship. The greater number of intelligent, and even learned, men, would feel but little regret in consigning (if it could be consigned) the much larger proportion of that philosophy to oblivion; except they may be supposed to love it as heathenism more than they admire it as wisdom; or except their pride would wish to retain it as a contrast to their own more rational theories.

The ancient speculations on religion include indeed some very noble ideas relating to a Supreme Being; but these ideas do not produce, in an intelligent man, any degree of partiality for that immense system, or rather chaos, of fantastic folly by which they are environed. He separates them from that chaos as something not strictly belonging to heathenism, nor forming a part of it. He considers most of them as the traditionary remains of divine communications to man in the earliest ages. A few of them were

perhaps the utmost efforts of human intellect at some happy moments excelling itself. But whether they are referred to the one origin or the other, they stand so conspicuously above the general assemblage of the pagan speculations on the subject of Deity, that they throw a solemn contempt on those speculations. They throw contempt on the greatest part of the theological doctrine of even the very philosophers that expressed them. They rather seem to direct our contemplation and affection toward a religion divinely revealed, than to obtain any degree of favour for those notions of a God, which sprung and indefinitely multiplied from a melancholy combination of ignorance and depraved imagination. As to the apparent analogy between some of the notions of pagan religion, and one or two of the most specific articles of christianity, those notions are presented in such fantastic, and varying, and often monstrous, shapes, that the analogy is not close and constant enough to pervert our conception, or to preclude our admission, of the defined propositions of the evangelic faith.

The next part of the pure speculations of the ancients, is, their metaphysics. And whatever may be the effect of metaphysical study in general, or of the particular systems of modern philosophers, with regard to the cordial and simple admission of christian doctrines, the ancient metaphysics may certainly be pronounced harmless, from holding so little connexion with modern opinions. Later philosophers, by means of a far better method of enquiry, have opened quite

a new order of metaphysical views; and persons with but a very small share of the acuteness and ingenuity of those ancient framers of ideal systems, can now wonder at their absurdity. The only attraction of abstract speculations is in their truth, and therefore when the persuasion of their truth is gone, all their influence is extinct. That which could please the imagination or interest the affections, might in a considerable degree continue to please and interest them, though convicted of fallacy. But that which is too subtile to please the imagination, loses all its power when it is rejected by the judgment. And this is the predicament to which time has reduced the metaphysics of the old philosophers. The captivation of their systems seems almost as far withdrawn from us as the songs of their syrens, or the enchantments of Medea.

The didactic morality of the heathen philosophers comes much nearer to our interests, and has probably continued to have a considerable influence on the sentiments of cultivated men. After being detained a great while among the phantasms and the monsters of mythology, or following through the mazes of ancient metaphysics that truth which occasionally appears for a moment, but still for ever retires before the pursuer, the student of antiquity is delighted to meet with a sage who gives him, in the most perspicuous and eloquent form, the direct instructions concerning duty and happiness. And since it is necessarily the substantial object of these instructions to enforce goodness, he feels but little cause to guard against any perversion

of his principles. He entirely forgets that goodness has been defined and enforced by another authority, and that though its main substance must be the same in the dictates of that authority, and in the writings of Epictetus, or Cicero, or Antoninus, yet there is a material difference in some parts of the detail, and a most important one in the principles that constitute the basis. While he is admiring the beauty of virtue as displayed by one accomplished moralist, and its lofty independent spirit as exhibited by another, he is not inclined to suspect that any thing in their sentiments, or his animated participation of them, can be wrong.

But the part of ancient literature which has had incomparably the greatest influence on the character of cultivated minds, is that which has turned, if I may so express it, moral sentiments into real beings, and interesting companions, by displaying the life and actions of eminent individuals. A few of the personages of fiction are also to be included. The captivating spirit of Greece and Rome resides in the works of the biographers, in so much of the history as might properly be called biography, from its fixing the whole attention and interest on a few signal names, and in the works of the principal poets.

No one, I suppose, will deny, that both the characters and the sentiments, which are the favourites of the poet and the historian, become the favourites also of the admiring reader; for this would be to deny the excellence of the poetry and eloquence. It is the high test and proof of genius that a writer can render his subject inte-

resting to his readers, not merely in a general way, but in the *very same manner* in which it interests himself. If the great works of antiquity had not this power, they would long since have ceased to charm. We could not long tolerate what revolted, while it was designed to please, our moral feelings. But if their characters and sentiments really do thus fascinate the heart, how far will this influence be coincident with the spirit and with the design of christianity ?*

Among the poets, I shall notice only the two or three pre-eminent ones of the Epic class.—Homer, you know, is the favourite of the whole civilized world; and it is many centuries since there needed one additional word of homage to the amazing genius displayed in the Iliad. The object of inquiry is, what kind of predisposition will be formed toward christianity in a young and animated spirit, that learns to glow with enthusiasm at the scenes created by Homer, and to indulge an ardent wish, which that enthusiasm will probably awaken, for the possibility of emulating some of the principal characters. Let this susceptible youth, after having mingled and burned in imagination among heroes, whose valour and anger flame like Vesuvius, who wade in blood, trample on dying foes, and hurl defiance against earth and heaven; let him be led

* It may be noticed here that a great part of what could be said on heathen literature as opposed to the religion of Christ, must necessarily refer to the peculiar *moral spirit* of that religion. It would border on the ridiculous to represent the martial enthusiasm of ancient historians and poets as counteracting the peculiar *doctrines* of the gospel.

into the company of Jesus Christ and his disciples, as displayed by the evangelists, with whose narrative, I will suppose, he is but slightly acquainted before. What must he, what can he, do with his feelings in this transition? He will find himself flung as far as "from the centre to the utmost pole;" and one of these two opposite exhibitions of character will inevitably excite his aversion. Which of them is that likely to be, if he is become thoroughly possessed with the Homeric passions?

Or if, on the other hand, you will suppose a person to have become profoundly interested by the new testament, and to have acquired the spirit of the Saviour of the world, while studying the evangelical history; with what sentiments will *he* come forth from conversing with heavenly mildness, weeping benevolence, sacred purity, and the eloquence of divine wisdom, to enter into a scene of such actions and characters, and to hear such maxims of merit and glory, as those of Homer? He would be still more confounded by the transition, had it been possible for him to have entirely escaped that deep depravation of feeling which can think of crimes and miseries with little emotion, and which we have all acquired from viewing the whole history of the world composed of scarcely any thing else. He would find the mightiest strain of poetry employed to represent ferocious courage as the greatest of virtues, and those who do not possess it as worthy of their fate, to be trodden in the dust. He will be taught, at least it will not be the fault of the poet if he is not taught, to forgive a heroic

spirit for finding the sweetest luxury in insulting dying pangs, and imagining the tears and despair of distant parents or wives. He will be incessantly called upon to worship revenge, the real divinity of the Iliad, in comparison of which the Thunderer of Olympus is but a despicable pretender to power. He will be taught that the most glorious and enviable life is that to which the greatest number of other lives are made a sacrifice; and that it is noble in a hero to prefer even a short life attended by this felicity, to a long one which should permit a longer life also to others. The dire Achilles, a being whom, if he really existed, it had deserved a conspiracy of the tribes then called nations to chain or to suffocate, is rendered interesting even amidst the horrors of revenge and destruction, by the intensity of his affection for his friend, by the melancholy sublimity with which he appears in the funeral scene of that friend, by one momentary instance of compassion, and by his solemn reference to his own approaching death. A reader who has even passed beyond the juvenile ardour of life, feels himself interested, in a manner that excites at intervals his own surprise, in the fate of this stern destroyer; and he wonders, and he wishes to doubt, whether the moral that he is learning be, after all, exactly no other than that the grandest employment of a great spirit is the destruction of human creatures, so long as revenge, ambition, or even caprice, may choose to regard them under an artificial distinction, and call them *enemies*. But this, my dear friend, is the real and effective moral of the Iliad, after all

that critics have so gravely written about lessons of union, or any other subordinate moral instructions, which they discover or imagine in the work. Who but critics ever thought or cared about these instructions? Whatever is the chief and grand impression made by the whole work on the ardent minds which are most susceptible of the influence of poetry, *that* is the real moral; and Alexander, and, by reflection from him, Charles XII. correctly received the genuine inspiration.

If it be said that such works stand on the same ground, except as to the reality or accuracy of the facts, with an eloquent history, which simply *exhibits* the actions and characters, I deny the assertion. The actions and characters are presented in a *manner* which prevents their just impression, and empowers them to make an opposite one. A transforming magic of genius displays a number of atrocious savages in a hideous slaughter-house of men, as demigods in a temple of glory. No doubt an eloquent history might be so written as to give the same aspect to such men, and such operations; but that history would deserve to be committed to the flames. A history that should present a perfect display of human miseries and slaughter, would incite no one, that had not attained the last possibility of depravation, to imitate the principal actors. It would give the same feeling as the sight of a field of dead and dying men after a battle is over; a sight at which the soul would shudder, and earnestly wish that this might be the last time the sun should behold such a spectacle: but the tendency of the

Homeric poetry, and of a great part of epic poetry in general, is to insinuate the glory of repeating such a tragedy. I therefore ask again, how it would be possible for a man whose mind was first completely assimilated to the spirit of Jesus Christ, to read such a work without a most vivid antipathy to what he perceived to be the moral spirit of the poet? And if it were not too strange a supposition, that the most characteristic parts of the Iliad had been read in the presence and hearing of our Lord, and by a person animated by a fervid sympathy with the work—do you not instantly imagine Him expressing the most emphatical condemnation? Would not the reader have been made to know, that in the spirit of that book he could never become a disciple and a friend of the Messiah? But then, if he believed this declaration, and were serious enough to care about being the disciple and friend of the Messiah, would he not have deemed himself extremely unfortunate to have been seduced, through the pleasures of taste and imagination, into habits of feeling which rendered it impossible, till they could be destroyed, for him to receive the only true religion, and the only redeemer of the world? To shew *how* impossible it would be, I wish I may be pardoned for making another strange and indeed a most monstrous supposition, namely, that Achilles, Diomede, Ulysses, and Ajax had been real persons, living in the time of our Lord, and had become his disciples, and yet (excepting the mere exchange of the notions of mythology for christian opinions,) had retained entire the state of mind with which their poet has exhibited

them. It is instantly perceived that Satan, Beelzebub, and Moloch might as consistently have been retained in heaven. But here the question comes to a point: if these great examples of glorious character pretending to coalesce with the transcendent Sovereign of virtues, would have been probably the most enormous incongruity existing, or that ever had existed, in the whole universe, what harmony can there be between a man who has acquired a considerable degree of congeniality with the spirit of these heroes, and that paramount Teacher and Pattern of excellence? And who will assure me that the enthusiast for heroic poetry does *not* acquire a degree of this congeniality? But unless I can be so assured, I persist in asserting the noxiousness of such poetry.

Yet the work of Homer is, notwithstanding, the book which christian poets have translated, which christian divines have edited and commented on with pride, at which christian ladies have been delighted to see their sons kindle into rapture, and which forms an essential part of the course of a liberal education, over all those countries on which the gospel shines. And who can tell how much that passion for war which, from the universality of its prevalence, might seem inseparable from the nature of man, may, in the civilized world, have been reinforced by the enthusiastic admiration with which young men have read Homer, and similar poets, whose genius transforms what is, and ought always to appear, purely horrid, into an aspect of grandeur?

Should it be asked, And what ought to be the practical consequence of such observations? I may surely answer that I cannot justly be required to assign that consequence. I cannot be required to do more than exhibit in a simple light an important point of truth. *If* such works do really impart their own genuine spirit to the mind of an admiring reader, in proportion to the degree in which he admires, and *if* this spirit is totally hostile to that of christianity, and *if* christianity ought really and in good faith to be the supreme regent of all moral feelings, then it is evident that the Iliad, and all books which combine the same tendency with great poetical excellence, are among the most michievous things on earth. There is but little satisfaction certainly in illustrating the operation of evils without proposing any adequate method of contending with them. But in the present case, I really do not see what a serious observer of the character of mankind can offer. To wish that the works of Homer, and some other great authors of antiquity, should cease to be read, is just as vain as to wish they had never been written. As to the far greater number of the readers, it were equally in vain to wish that pure christian sentiments might be sufficiently recollected, and loved, to accompany the study, and constantly prevent the injurious impression, of the works of pagan genius. The few maxims of christianity to which the student may have assented without thought, and for which he has but little veneration, will but feebly oppose the influence; the spirit of Homer will vanquish as irresistibly as his Achilles van-

quished. It is also most perfectly true, that so long as pride, ambition, and vindictiveness, hold so mighty a prevalence in the character and in the nature of our species, they would still amply display themselves, though the stimulus of heroic poetry were withdrawn by the annihilation of all those works which have invested the worst passions, and the worst actions, with a glare of grandeur. With or without classical ideas, men and nations will continue to commit offences against one another, and to avenge them; to assume an arrogant precedence, and account it noble spirit; to celebrate their deeds of destruction, and call them glory; to idolize the men who possess, and can infuse, the greatest share of an infernal fire; to set at nought all principles of virtue and religion in favour of a thoughtless vicious mortal who consigns himself in the same achievement to fame and perdition; to vaunt in triumphal entries, or funeral pomps, or strings of scalps, how far human skill and valour can excel the powers of famine and pestilence; men and nations will continue thus to act, till some new dispensation of heaven shall establish the reign of christianity. In that better season, perhaps the great works of ancient genius will be read with such a state of mind as can receive the intellectual improvement derivable from them, and at the same time as little coincide or be infected with their moral spirit, as in the present age we venerate their mythological vanities.

In the mean time, one cannot believe that any man who seriously reflects how absolutely the

religion of Christ claims a conformity of his whole nature, will without regret feel himself animated, even for a moment, with a class of sentiments of which the habitual prevalence would be the total preclusion of christianity. And it seems to shew how little this religion is really understood, or even considered, in any of the countries denominated christian, that so many who profess to adopt it never once thought of guarding their own minds, and those of their children, against the eloquent seductions of a spirit which is mortally opposite. Probably they would be more intelligent and vigilant, if any other interest than that of their professed religion were endangered. But a thing which injures them only in *that* concern, is sure to meet with all possible indulgence.

With respect to religious parents and preceptors, whose children and pupils are to receive that liberal education which must inevitably include the study of these great works, it will be for them to accompany the youthful readers throughout, with a great and anxious effort to shew them in the most pointed manner the inconsistency of many of the sentiments, both with moral rectitude in general, and with the special dictates of christianity. And in order to give the requisite force to these dictates, it will be an important duty to illustrate to them the amiable tendency, and to prove the awful authority, of this dispensation of religion. This careful effort will often but very partially prevent the mischief; but it seems to be all that can be done.

Virgil's work is a kind of lunar reflection of the ardent effulgence of Homer; surrounded, if

I may extend the figure, with as beautiful a halo of elegance and tenderness as perhaps the world ever saw*. So much more refined an order of sentiment might have rendered the heroic character far more attractive to a mind that can melt as well as burn, if there had actually been a hero in the poem. But none of the personages intended for heroes excite the reader's enthusiasm enough to assimilate the tone of his feelings. No fiction or history of human characters and actions will ever powerfully transfuse its spirit without some one or some very few individuals of signal peculiarity or greatness, to concentrate and embody the whole energy of the work. There would be no danger therefore of any one's becoming an idolater of the god of war through the inspiration of the Æneid, even if a larger proportion of it had been devoted to martial enterprise. Perhaps the chief counteraction to christian sentiments which I should apprehend to an opening susceptible mind, would be a depravation of its ideas concerning the other world, from the picturesque scenery which Virgil has opened to his hero in the regions of the dead, and the solemn and interesting images with which he has shaded the avenue to them. Perhaps also the affecting sentiments which precede the death of Dido, might tend to lessen, especially in a pensive mind, the horror of that impiety which would throw back with violence the possession of life into the hands of him who gave it.

* Except he is outrivalled in tenderness by Ossian.

LETTER VI.

WHEN I add the name of Lucan, I must confess that no author of antiquity, that I know, would have so much power to seduce my feelings, in respect of moral greatness, into a train not coincident with christianity. His leading characters are widely different from those of Homer, and of a greatly superior order. The mighty genius of Homer appeared and departed in a rude age of the human mind, a stranger to the intellectual enlargement which would have enabled him to combine in his heroes the dignity of thought, instead of mere physical force, with the energy of passion. For want of this, they are great heroes without being great *men*. They appear to you only as tremendous fighting and destroying animals; a kind of human Mammoths. The rude efforts of personal conflict are all they can understand and admire, and in their warfare their minds never reach to any of the sublimer results even of war; their chief and final object seems to be the mere savage glory of fighting, and the annihilation of their enemies.—When the heroes of Lucan, both the depraved and the nobler class, are employed in war, it seems but a small part of what they can do and what they intend; they have always something further and greater in view than to evince their valour, or to riot in the vengeance of victory. Even the ambition of Pompey and Cæsar seems almost to become a grand passion, when compared to the contracted as well as detestable aim

of Homer's chiefs; while this passion too is confined to narrow and vulgar designs, in comparison with the views which actuated Cato and Brutus. The contempt of death, which in the heroes of the Iliad often seems like an incapacity or an oblivion of thought, is in Lucan's favourite characters the result, or at least the associate, of profound reflection; and this strongly contrasts their courage with that of Homer's warriors, which is (according indeed to his own frequent similes) the daring of wild beasts. Lucan sublimates martial into moral grandeur. Even if you could deduct from his great men all that which forms the specific display of the hero, you would find their greatness undiminished; they would be commanding and interesting men still. The better class of them, amidst war itself, hate and deplore the spirit and ferocious exploits of war. They are indignant at the vices of mankind for compelling *their virtue* into a career in which such sanguinary glories can be acquired. And while they deem it their duty to exert their courage in a just cause, they regard camps and battles as vulgar things, from which their thoughts often turn away into a train of solemn contemplations in which they rise sometimes to the empyreal region of sublimity. You have a more absolute impression of grandeur from a speech of Cato, than from all the mighty exploits that epic poetry ever blazoned. The eloquence of Lucan's moral heroes does not consist in images of triumph and conquests, but in reflections on virtue, sufferings, destiny, and death; and the sentiments expressed in his own name have often a melancholy tinge which ren-

ders them irresistibly interesting. He might seem to have felt a presage, while musing on the last of the Romans, that their poet was soon to follow them. The reader becomes devoted both to the poet and to these illustrious men; but, under the influence of this attachment, he adopts all their sentiments, and exults in the sympathy; forgetting, or unwilling, to reflect, whether this state of feeling is concordant with the religion of Christ, and with the spirit of the apostles and martyrs. The most seducing of Lucan's sentiments, to a mind enamoured of pensive sublimity, are those concerning death. I remember the very principle which I would wish to inculcate, that is, the necessity that a believer of the gospel should preserve the christian style of feeling predominant in his mind, and clear of every incongruous mixture, having struck me with great force amidst the enthusiasm with which I read many times over the memorable account of Vulteius, the speech by which he inspired his gallant band with a passion for death, and the reflections on death with which the poet closes the episode. I said to myself with a sensation of conscience, What are these sentiments with which I am burning? Are these the just ideas of death? Are they such as were taught by our Lord? Is this the spirit with which St. Paul approached his last hour? And I felt a painful collision between this reflection and the passion inspired by the poet. I perceived with the clearest certainty that the kind of interest which I felt was no less than a real adoption, for the time, of the very same sentiments by which he was animated.

The epic poetry has been selected for the principal subject of my remarks, from the conviction that it has had a much greater influence on the moral sentiments of succeeding ages than all the other poetry of antiquity, by means of its impressive display of individual great characters. And it will be admitted, I believe, that the moral spirit of the epic poets, taken together, is as little in opposition to the christian theory of moral sentiments as that of the collective poetry of other kinds. The Greek tragedies abound with just and elevated sentiments, tending to lead the mind to the same habits of thought as the best of the pagan didactic moralists. And these sentiments are more forcibly impressed by means of being accompanied with a well-combined series of action, than they could be by mere moral writing. They are however far less powerfully impressed by the happiest combination of dramatic action than by such striking and sublime individual characters as those of epic poetry. It would seem not to have been the design of the ancient tragic poets, nor to have been allowed by their critical laws, to introduce such sublime characters. The mind of the reader does not retain for months and years an animated recollection of some personage whose name incessantly recalls the sentiments which he uttered, or which his conduct made us feel. Still, however, the moral spirit of the Greek tragedies acts with a considerable force on a susceptible mind; and if there should be but half as great a difference between the quality of the instructions which they will impart, and the principles of evangelic morality, as there was between the religious knowledge and moral spi-

rit of poets who wrote and contended for their own fame in Greece, and the divine illumination and noble character of those apostles that opened a commission from heaven to transform the world, the student may have some cause to be careful lest his Athenian morality should disincline him to the doctrines of a better school.

I shall not dwell long on the biography and history, since it appears to me that their influence is very nearly co-incident with that of the epic poetry. The work of Plutarch, the chief of the biographers, (a work so necessary, it would seem, to the consolations of a christian, that I think I have read of some author who did not profess to disbelieve the New Testament, declaring that if he were to be cast on a desert island, and could have one book, and but one, it should be this,) the work of Plutarch delineates a greatness partly of the same character as that celebrated by Homer, and partly of the far more dignified and intellectual kind which is so commanding in the great men of Lucan, several of of whom indeed are the subjects also of the biographer. Various distinctions might, no doubt, be remarked in the impression made by great characters as exhibited in poetry, and as presented in the simple historical form: but I am persuaded that the habits of feeling which will grow from admiring the one or the other, will be substantially the same as to a cordial reception of the religion of Christ.

A number of the men displayed by the biographers and historians, rose so eminently above the general character of the human race, that their names have become inseparably associated

with our ideas of moral greatness. A thoughtful student of antiquity enters this majestic company with an impression of mystical awfulness, resembling that of Ezekiel in his vision. This select and revered assembly includes only those who were distinguished by elevated virtue, as well as powerful talents and memorable actions: undoubtedly the stupendous powers and energy without moral excellence, so often displayed on the field of ancient history, compel a kind of prostration of the soul in the presence of men, whose surpassing achievements seem to silence, for a while, and but for a while, the sense of justice which must execrate their ambition and their crimes. But where greatness of mind seems but secondary to greatness of virtue, as in the examples of Phocion, Epaminondas, Aristides, Timoleon, Dion, and a considerable number more, the heart applauds itself for feeling an irresistible captivation. This number indeed is small, compared with the whole enumeration of renowned names; but it is large enough to fill the mind, and to give as venerable an impression of pagan greatness, as if none of its examples had been the heroes, whose fierce brilliance lightens through the blackness of their depravity; or the legislators, orators, and philosophers, whose wisdom was degraded by hypocrisy, venality, or vanity.

A most impressive part of the influence of ancient character on modern feelings is derived from the accounts of two or three of the greatest philosophers, whose virtue, protesting and solitary in the times in which they lived, whose

intense devotedness to the pursuit of wisdom, and whose occasional sublime glimpses of thought, darting beyond the sphere of error in which they were enclosed and benighted, present them to the mind with something like the venerableness of the prophets of God. Among the exhibitions of this kind, it is unnecessary to say that Xenophon's Memoir of Socrates stands unrivalled and above comparison.

Sanguine spirits without number have probably been influenced in modern times by the ancient history of mere heroes; but persons of a reflective disposition have been incomparably more affected by the contemplation of those men, whose combination of mental power with illustrious virtue constitutes the supreme glory of heathen antiquity.—And why do I deem the admiration of this noble display of moral excellence pernicious to these reflective minds, in relation to the religion of Christ? For the simplest possible reason; because the principles of that excellence are not identical with the principles of this religion; as I believe every serious and self-observant man who has been attentive to them both, will have verified in his own experience. He has felt the animation which pervaded his soul, in musing on the virtues, the sentiments, and the great actions, of these dignified men, suddenly expiring, when he has attempted to prolong or transfer it to the virtues, sentiments, and actions, of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Sometimes he has, with mixed wonder and indignation, remonstrated with his own feelings, and has said, I know there is the highest excellence in the religion of the Messiah, and

in the characters of his most magnanimous followers; and surely it is *excellence* also that attracts me to those other illustrious men; why then cannot I take a full delightful interest in them both? But it is all in vain; he finds this amphibious devotion impossible. And he will always find it so; for, antecedently to experience, it would be obvious that the order of sentiments which was the life and soul of the one form of excellence, is extremely distinct from that which is the animating spirit of the other. If the whole system of a christian's sentiments is required to be exactly adjusted to the economy of redemption, they must be widely different from those of the men, however wise or virtuous, who never thought or heard of the Saviour of the world; else, where is the peculiarity or importance of this new dispensation, which does however both avow and manifest a most extreme peculiarity, and with which heaven has connected the signs and declarations of its being of infinite importance? If, again, a christian's grand object and solicitude is to please God, this must constitute his moral excellence, (even though the *facts* were the same,) of a very different nature from that of the men, who had no god that they cared to please, and whose highest glory it might possibly become, that they boldly differed from their gods; as Lucan undoubtedly intended it as the most emphatical applause of Cato, that he was the inflexible patron and hero of the cause which the gods doomed to ruin. If humility is required to be a chief characteristic in a christian's mind, he is here again placed in a state of contrariety to that love of glory which accompanied.

and was applauded as a virtue while it accompanied, almost all the moral greatness of the heathens. If a christian lives for eternity, and advances towards death with the certain expectation of judgment, and of a new and awful world, how different must be the essential quality of his serious sentiments, as partly created, and totally pervaded, by this mighty anticipation, from the order of feeling of the virtuous heathens, who had no clear or sublime expectations beyond death! The interior essences, if I may so speak, of the two kinds of excellence, sustained or produced by these two systems of thought, are so different, that they will hardly be more convertible or compatible in the same mind than even excellence and depravity.—Now it appears to me that the enthusiasm, with which a mind of deep and thoughtful sensibility dwells on the history of sages, virtuous legislators, and the noblest class of heroes, of heathen antiquity, will be found to beguile that mind into an order of sentiments congenial with theirs, and therefore thus seriously different from the spirit and principles of christianity*. It is not exactly that the judgment admits distinct pagan propositions, but the heart insensibly acquires an uni-

* If it should be said that, in admiring pagan excellence, the mind takes the mere *facts* of that excellence, separately from the principles, and as far as they are identical with the facts of christian excellence, and then connecting christian principles with them, converts the whole into a christian character before it cordially admires, I appeal to experience, while I assert that this is not true. If it were, the mind would be able to turn with full complacency from an affectionate admiration of an illustrious heathen, to admire, in the very same train of feeling and with still warmer emotion, the excellence of St. Paul; which is not the fact.

son with many of the sentiments which *imply* those propositions, and are wrong unless those propositions are right. It forgets that a different state of feeling, corresponding to a vastly different scheme of propositions, is appointed by the Sovereign Judge of all things as (with relation to *us*) an indispensable preparation for entering the eternal paradise*; and that now, no moral distictions, however splendid, are excellence in his sight, if not conformed to this standard. It slides into a persuasion that, under *any* economy, to be exactly like one of these heathen examples would be a competent qualification for any world to which good spirits are to be assigned. The devoted admirer contemplates them as the most enviable specimens of his nature, and almost wishes he could have been one of them, without reflecting that this would have been under the condition, among many other circumstances, of adoring Jupiter, Bacchus, or Æsculapius, and of despising even the deities that he adored; and under the condition of being a stranger to the Son of God, and to all that he has disclosed and accomplished for the felicity of our race. It would even throw an ungracious chill on his ardour, if an evangelical monitor should whisper, "Recollect Jesus Christ," and express his regret that these illustrious men could not have been privileged to be elevated into christians. If precisely the word "elevated" were used, he might have a

* I hope none of these observations will be understood to insinuate the impossibility of the future happiness of virtuous heathens. But a disquisition on the subject would here most obviously be out of place.

feeling, at the instant, as if it were not the *right* word. But this state of mind is no less than a most serious hostility to the gospel, which these feelings are practically pronouncing to be either unnecessay or wrong; and therefore that noblest part of ancient literature which tends to produce it, is inexpressibly injurious. It had been happy for many cultivated and aspiring minds, if the men whose characters form the moral magnificence of the classical history, had been such atrocious villains, that their names could not have been recollected without execration. Nothing can be more disastrous than to be led astray by eminent virtue and intelligence, which can give a feeling of grandeur, or of an alliance with grandeur, in the deviation.

It will require a very affecting impression of the christian truth, a very strongly marked idea of the christian character, and a habit of thinking with sympathetic admiration of the most elevated class of christians, to preserve entire the evangelical spirit among the examples of what might pardonably have been deemed the most exalted style of man, if a revelation had not been received from heaven. Some views of this excellence it were in vain for a christian to forbid himself to admire; but he absolutely *must* learn to admire under a severe and solemn restriction, else every emotion is a desertion of his cause. He must learn to assign these men in thought to another sphere, and to regard them as beings under a different economy with which our relations are dissolved; as marvellous specimens of a certain imperfect kind of moral greatness, formed on a model foreign to true religion, which model is

crumbled to dust and given to the winds.—At the same time, he may emphatically deplore, while viewing some of these men, that, if so much excellence could be formed on such a model, the sacred system on which his own character professes to be formed, should not have raised him almost to heaven. So much for the effect of the most interesting part of ancient literature.

In the next letter I shall make some observations, in reference to the same object, on modern polite literature. Many of these must unavoidably be very analogous to those already made; since the greatest number of the modern fine writers acquired much of the character of their minds from those of the ancient world. Probably indeed the ancients have exerted a much more extensive influence in modern times by means of the modern writers to whom they have communicated their moral spirit, than immediately by their own works.

LETTER VII.

TO a man who had long observed the influences which tyrannise over human passions and opinions, it would not perhaps have appeared strange, that when the Grand Renovator came on earth, and during the succeeding ages, a number of the men whose superior talents were to carry on the course of literature, and guide the progress of the human mind, should reject his religion. These I have placed out of the ques-

tion, as it is not my object to shew the injuries which christianity has received from its avowed enemies. But it might have been expected, that all the intelligent men, from that hour to the end of time, who should really *admit* this religion, would perceive the sovereignty and universality of its claims, and feel that every thing unconsonant with it ought instantly to vanish from the whole system of approved sentiments and the whole school of literature, and to keep as absolutely aloof as the Israelites from the boundary that guarded Mount Sinai. It might have been presumed, that all principles which the new dispensation rendered obsolete, or declared or implied to be wrong, should no more be regarded as belonging to the system of principles to be henceforward received and taught, than dead bodies in their graves belong to the race of living men. To retain or recall them would therefore be as offensive to the judgment, as to take up these bodies and place them in the paths of men, would be offensive to the senses; and as absurd as the practice of the ancient Egyptians, who carried their embalmed ancestors to their festivals. It might have been supposed, that whatever christianity had actually changed, abolished, or supplied, would therefore be *practically* regarded by these believers of it as changed, abolished, or supplied; and that they would, in all their writings, be at least as careful of their fidelity in this great article, as a man who adopts the Newtonian philosophy, would be certain to exclude from his scientific discourse all ideas that seriously implied the Ptolemaic or Tychonic system to be true. Necessarily, a number of

these literary believers would write on subjects so completely foreign to what comes within the cognizance of christianity, that a pure neutrality, which should avoid all interference with it, would be all that could be claimed from them in its behalf; though at the same time, one would feel some degree of regret, to see a man of enlarged mind exhausting his ability and his life on these foreign subjects, without devoting some short interval to the service of that which he believes to be of far surpassing moment.*

But the great number who chose to write on subjects that come within the relations of the christian system, as on the various views of morals, the distinctions and judgments of human character, and the theory of happiness, with almost unavoidable references sometimes to our connection with Deity, to death, and to a future state, ought to have written every page under the recollection, that these subjects are not left free for

* I could not help feeling a degree of this regret in reading lately the memoirs of the admirable and estimable Sir William Jones. Some of his researches in Asia have incidentally served, in a very important manner, the cause of religion; but did he think the last possible direct service had been rendered to christianity, that his accomplished mind was left at leisure for hymns to the Hindu gods? Was not this even a violation of the neutrality, and an offence, not only against the gospel, but against theism itself? I know what may be said about personification, licence of poetry, and so on; but should not a worshipper of God hold himself under a solemn obligation to abjure all tolerance of even poetical figures that can seriously seem, in any way whatever, to recognise the pagan divinities, or abominations, as the prophets of Jehovah would have called them? What would Elijah have said to such an employment of talents in his time? It would have availed little to have told him that these divinities were only personifications (with their appropriate representative idols) of objects in nature, of elements, or of abstractions. He would have sternly replied, And was not Baal, whose prophets I have destroyed, the same?

careless or arbitrary sentiment, since the time that "God has spoken to us by his Son;" and that the noblest composition would be only so much eloquent impiety, if not concordant with the dictates of the new testament. Had this been the prevalent recollection amidst the studies of the fine writers of the christian world, an ingenuous mind might have read alternately their works and those of the evangelists and apostles, without being confounded by a perception of some deadly antipathy between the inspirations of genius and the inspirations of heaven.

I confine my view chiefly to the elegant literature of our own country. And it may be presumed, independently of any actual comparison, that this, after the exclusion of works directly conducing to infidelity and vice, quite as little exceptionable as the belles lettres of any nation, of modern Europe, for this plain reason, that the extended prevalence of that happy light which arose at the reformation, through almost the whole period that has produced our works of genius and taste, must necessarily, by presenting the religion of Christ in somewhat more of its genuine dignity, have compelled from the intellectual men who could not reject its truth, a respect which the same class of men in popish countries would be but little inclined to feel, or which would generally be, if they did feel it, but the homage of superstition, which injured the sacred cause another way.

I do not assign any class of writers directly theological to the polite literature of a country, not even the illustrious sermon-writers of France; as it is probable that works of direct theology

have formed but a small part of that school of thinking and taste, in which the generality of cultivated men have acquired the moral conformation of their minds. That school is composed of poets, moral philosophers, historians, essayists, and, you may add, the writers of fiction. If the great majority of these authors have injured, and still injure, their pupils in the most important of all their interests, it is a very serious consideration, both in respect to the accountableness of the authors, and the final effect on their pupils. I maintain that they are guilty of this injury.

On so wide a field, my dear friend, it would be in vain to attempt making particular references and selections to verify all these remarks. I must appeal for their truth to your own acquaintance with our popular fine writers.

In the first place, and as a general observation, the alleged injury has been done, to a great extent, by Omission, or rather, it should be called Exclusion. And here I do not refer so much to that unworthy care, which seems prevalent through the works of our ingenious authors, to avoid *formally* treating on any topics of a precisely evangelical kind, as the absence of that christian tinge and modification, (indicated partly by the occasional expression of christian recollections, and partly by a solicitous, though it were a tacit, conformity to every principle of the christian theory,) which should be diffused universally through the sentiments that regard man as a moral being.—Consider how small a portion of the serious subjects of thought can be detached from all connexion with the religion of Christ, without narrowing the scope to which he meant it to extend, and

repelling its intervention where he intended it to intervene. The book which unfolds it, has exaggerated its comprehensiveness, and the first distinguished christians had a delusive view of it, if it does not actually claim to mingle its principles with the whole system of moral ideas, so as to impart to them a specific character; in the same manner as the element of fire, interfused through the various forms and combinations of other elements, produces throughout them, even when latent, a certain important modification, which they would instantly lose, and therefore lose their perfect condition, by its exclusion.

And this claim to extensive interference, made, as a matter of authority, for the christian principles, appears to be supported by their *nature*. For they are not of a nature which necessarily restricts them to a peculiar department, like the principles which constitute some of the sciences. We should at once perceive the absurdity of a man who should be attempting to adjust all his ideas on general subjects according to the principles of geometry, and who should maintain (if any man could do so preposterous a thing) that geometrical laws ought to enter into the essence of our reasoning on politics and morals. This I own is taking an illustration in the extreme; since geometrical and moral truth are not only very different, but of a nature essentially distinct. Let any other class of principles foreign to moral subjects be selected, in order to its being shewn how absurd is the effect of an attempt to stretch them beyond their proper sphere, and force them into some connexion with ideas with which they have no relation. Let it be shewn how they

can in no degree modify the subject to which they are attempted to be applied, nor mingle with the reasonings concerning it, any more than the powers of magnetism can be made to operate on brass. I would then shew that on the contrary the christian principles have something in their nature which has a relation with something in the nature of almost all serious subjects. Their being extended to those subjects therefore is not an arbitrary and forced application of them; it is merely permitting them to apply themselves to whatever they are in the nature of things related to. It must be obvious in a moment that the most general doctrines of christianity, such as those of a future judgment, and immortality, if believed to be true, have a direct relation with every thing that can be comprehended within the widest range of moral speculation and sentiment. It will also be found that the more particular doctrines, such as those of the moral depravity of our nature, an atonement made by the sacrifice of Christ, the interference of a special divine influence in renewing the human mind, and educating it for a future state, together with all the inferences, conditions, and motives resulting from them, cannot be admitted and religiously regarded, without combining themselves in numberless instances with a man's ideas on moral subjects. I mean that it is in their very *nature* thus to interfere and find out a relation with these ideas, even if there were no divine requisition that they should. The writer must therefore have retired beyond the limits of an immense field of important and most interesting speculations, must indeed have

retired beyond the limits of *all* the speculation most important to men, who can say that nothing in the religion of Christ bears, in any manner, on any part of his subject, any more than if he were a philosopher of Saturn.

And, in thus habitually interfering and combining with moral sentiments and speculations, the christian principles will greatly modify them. The evangelical ideas will stand in connexion with the moral ones not simply as *additional* ideas in the train of thinking, but as ideas which impart or dictate a particular character to the rest. A writer whose mind is so possessed with the christian principles that they thus continually suggest themselves in connexion with his serious speculations, will unavoidably present a moral subject in a somewhat different aspect, even if he make no express references to the gospel, from that in which it would be presented by another writer, whose habits of thought were clear of evangelical recollections. And in every train of thinking in which the serious recognition of those principles would produce this modification, it ought to be produced; so that the very last idea within the whole compass of speculation which would have a different cast as a ray of the gospel falls, or does not fall upon it, should be faithfully exhibited in that light alone. The christian principles cannot be true without determining what shall be true in the mode of representing all those subjects with which they hold a connexion. Obviously, as far as the gospel *can* go, and does by its relations with things thus claim to go, with a modifying power, it cannot be a matter of indifference whether it *do* go or

not; for nothing on which its application would have this effect, would be equally right as so modified and as not so modified. That which is made precisely correct by this qualified condition, must therefore, separately from it, be incorrect. He who has sent a revelation to declare the theory of sacred truth, and to define the relations of all moral sentiment with that truth, cannot give his sanction at once to this final constitution, and to that which disowns it. He therefore disowns that which disowns the religion of Christ. And what he disowns he condemns, thus placing all moral sentiments in the same predicament, with regard to the christian economy, in which Jesus Christ placed his contemporaries, "He that is not with me is against me."—The order of ideas, thus dissentient from the christian system, presumes the existence, or attempts the creation, of some other economy.

Now, in casting a recollective glance over our elegant literature, the far greater part, as far as I am acquainted with it, appears to me to fall under the utmost weight of this condemnation. After a comparatively small number of names and books are excepted, what are called the British Classics, with the addition of very many works of great literary merit that have not quite attained that rank, present an immense vacancy of christianized sentiment. The authors do not exhibit the signs of having ever deeply studied christianity, or of retaining any discriminative and serious impression of it. Whatever has strongly occupied a man's attention, affected his feelings, and filled his mind with ideas, will even unintentionally shew itself in the train and cast

of his discourse; these writers do not in this manner betray that their faculties have been occupied and interested to the utmost by the views unfolded in the evangelic dispensation. Of their being solemnly conversant with these views you discover no notices analogous, for instance, to those which appear in the writing or discourse of a man, who has lately passed some time amidst the wonders of Rome or Egypt, and who shews you, by almost unconscious allusions and images naturally and often occurring in his language even on other subjects, how profoundly he has been interested in contemplating triumphal arches, columns, temples, and pyramids. Their minds are not naturalized, if I may so speak, to the images and scenery of the kingdom of Christ, or to that kind of light which the gospel throws on all objects. They are somewhat like the inhabitants of those towns within the vast salt mines of Sweden, who, beholding every object in their region by the light of lamps and candles only, have in their conversation no expressions describing things in such aspects as never appear but under the lights of heaven. You might observe, the next time that you open one of these works, how far you may read, without meeting with an idea of such a nature, or so expressed, as could not have been unless Jesus Christ had come into the the world*; even though the subject be one of those which he came to illuminate, and to enforce on the mind by new and most cogent arguments. And where so little of the light and

* Except perhaps in respect of humanity and benevolence, on which subject his instructions have improved the sentiments even of infidels, in spite of the rejection of their divine authority.

rectifying influence of these communications has been admitted into the habits of thought, there will be very few cordially reverential and animated references to the great Instructor himself. These will perhaps not oftener occur than a traveller in some parts of Africa, or Arabia, comes to a spot of green vegetation in the desert. You might have read a considerable number of volumes, without becoming apprized that there is such a dispensation in existence, or that such a sublime Minister of it had ever appeared among men. And you might have diligently read, for several years, and through several hundred volumes, without at all discovering its nature or importance, or that the writers, when alluding to it, admitted any high importance to be connected with it. You would only have conjectured it to be a scheme of opinions and discipline, which had appeared in its day, as many others had appeared, and left us, as the rest have left us, to follow our speculations our own way.

You would have supposed that these writers had probably heard of one Christ, as they have heard of one Confucius, as a teacher whose instructions contain possibly many good things, and to whose system a liberal mind will occasionally advert, well-pleased to see China, Greece, and Judea, as well as England, producing their philosophers, of various sorts, each in its turn. All the information which they would have supplied to your understanding, and all the conjectures to which they would have prompted your ingenuity, would have left you, if not instructed from other sources, to meet the real religion it-

self, when at length disclosed to you, as a thing of which you had no recognition, except by its name; as a wonderful novelty. How little you would have expected, from their literary and ethical glimpses, to find that it is at this moment the actual and sole economy by the provisions of which their happiness can be secured, by the laws of which they will be judged, which has declared the relations of man with his Creator, and specified the exclusive ground of acceptance; which is therefore of infinite consequence to you, and to them, and to all their readers, as fixing the entire theory of the condition and destinies of man on the final principles to which all theories and sentiments are solemnly required to be "brought into obedience."

Now, if the writers who have thus carefully preserved the whole world of interesting ideas which they have unfolded free from any evangelical intermixture, are really the chief instructors of persons of taste, and form, from early life, their habits of feeling and thought, it is easy to see that they must produce a state of mind very uncongenial with the gospel. Views, habitually presented to the mind, during its most susceptible periods, and through the main course of its improvements, in every varied light of sublimity and beauty, with every fascination of that taste, ingenuity, and eloquence, which it has learnt still more to admire each year as its faculties have expanded, will have become the settled order of its ideas. And it will feel the same complacency in this intellectual order, that, as inhabitants of the material world, we do in

the great arrangement of nature, in the green blooming earth, and the magnificent hemisphere of heaven.

LETTER VIII.

IT will be proper to specify somewhat more distinctly several of the particulars in which I consider the generality of our fine writers as disowning or contradicting the evangelical dispensation, and therefore beguiling their readers into a complacency in an order of sentiments that is unconsonant with it.

And one thing extremely obvious to remark, is, that the *good man*, the man of virtue, who is necessarily presented to view ten thousand times in the volumes of these writers, *is not a christian*. His character could have been formed though the christian revelation had never been opened on the earth, or though all the copies of the new testament had perished ages since; and it might have appeared admirable, but not peculiar.—There are no foreign unaccountable marks upon it, that could, in such a preclusion of the christian truth, have excited wonder what could be the relations or the object of such a strange but systematical singularity, and in what school or company it had acquired its principles and its feelings. Let it only be said that this man of virtue had conversed whole years with the instructions of Plato, Cicero, and Seneca, and all would be explained; nothing would lead to ask, "But with whom then has he conversed *since*,

to lose so completely the appropriate character of his school, under the broad impression of some other mightier influence ?"

The good man of our polite literature never talks with affectionate devotion of Christ, as the great High Priest of his profession, as the exalted Friend, whose injunctions are the laws of his virtues, whose work and sacrifice are the basis of his hopes, whose doctrines guide and awe his reasonings, and whose example is the pattern which he is earnestly aspiring to resemble. The last intellectual and moral designations in the world by which it would occur to you to describe him, would be those by which the Apostles so much exulted to be recognised, a disciple, and a servant, of Jesus Christ; nor would he (I am supposing this character to become a real person) be at all gratified by being so described. You do not hear him avowing that he deems the habitual remembrance of Christ essential to the nature of that excellence which he is cultivating. He rather seems, with the utmost coolness of choice, adopting virtue as according with the dignity of a rational agent, than to be in the least degree impelled to it by any relations with the Saviour of the world.

On the supposition of a person realizing this character having fallen into the company of St. Paul, you can easily imagine the total want of congeniality. Though both avowedly devoted to truth, to virtue, and perhaps to religion, the difference in the cast of their sentiments would have been as great as that between the physical constitution and habitudes of a native of the country at the equator, and those of one from the

arctic regions. Would not the apostle's feeling of the continual intervention of ideas concerning one Object, in all subjects, places, and times, have appeared to this man of virtue and wisdom inconceivably mystical? In what manner would he have listened to the emphatical expressions respecting the love of Christ constraining us, living not to ourselves but to him that died for us and rose again, counting all things but loss for the knowledge of Christ, being ardent to win Christ and be found in him, and trusting that Christ should be magnified in our body, whether by life or by death? Perhaps St. Paul's energy, and the appearance of its being accompanied by the firmest intellect, might have awed him into silence. But amidst that silence, he must, in order to defend his self-complacency, have decided that the apostle's mind had fallen, notwithstanding its strength, under the dominion of an irrational association; for he would have been conscious that no such ideas had ever kindled his affections, and that no such affections had ever animated his actions; and yet *he* was indubitably a good man, and could, in another style, be as eloquent for goodness as St. Paul himself. He would therefore have concluded, either that it was not necessary to be a christian, or that this order of feelings was not necessary to that character. But if the apostle's sagacity had detected the cause of this reserve, and the nature of his associate's reflections, he would most certainly have declared to him with great solemnity that both these things were necessary—or that he had been deceived by inspiration; and he would have parted from this self-complacent man with admo-

nition and compassion. Now would St. Paul have been wrong? But if he would have been right, what becomes of those authors, whose works, whether from neglect or design, tend to satisfy their readers of the perfection of a form of character which he would have pronounced fatally defective?

Again, moral writings are instructions on the subject of happiness. Now the doctrine of this subject is declared in the evangelical testimony: it had been strange indeed if it had not, when the happiness of man was the precise object of the communication. And what, according to this communication, are the essential requisites to that condition of the mind without which no man ought to be called happy; without which ignorance or insensibility alone can be content, and folly alone can be cheerful? A simple reader of the christian scriptures will reply that they are—a change of heart, called conversion, the assurance of the pardon of sin through Jesus Christ, a habit of devotion approaching so near to intercourse with the Supreme Object of devotion that revelation has called it communion with God, a process of improvement called sanctification, a confidence in the divine Providence that all things shall work together for good, and a conscious preparation for another life, including a firm hope of eternal felicity. And what else can he reply? What else can you reply? Did the lamp of heaven ever shine more clearly since omnipotence lighted it, than these ideas display themselves through the new testament? Is this then absolutely the true, and the only true, account of happiness? It is not that which our ac-

complished writers in general have chosen to sanction. Your recollection will tell you that they have most certainly presumed to avow, or to insinuate, a doctrine of happiness which implies much of the christian doctrine to be a needless intruder on our speculations, or an imposition on our belief; and I am astonished that this serious fact should so little have alarmed the christian student of elegant literature. The wide difference between the dictates of the two authorities is too evident to be overlooked; for the writers in question have very rarely, amidst an immense assemblage of sentiments concerning happiness, made any reference to what the new testament so obviously declares to be its constituent and vital principles. How many times you might read the sun or the moon to repose, before you would find an assertion or a recognition, for instance, of a change of the mind being requisite to happiness, in any terms commensurate with the significance which this article seems to bear in all the various forms in which it is expressed and repeated in the new testament. Some of these writers appear hardly to have admitted or to have recollected even the proposition, that happiness must essentially consist in something so fixed in the mind itself as to be substantially independent of external circumstances; for their most animated representations of it are merely descriptions of fortunate combinations of these circumstances, and of the feelings immediately caused by them, which will expire the moment that these combinations are broken up. The greater number however have fully admitted the proposition, and have given their illustrations of

the doctrine of happiness accordingly. And what appears in these illustrations as the highest form of happiness? It is, probably, that of a man feeling an elevated complacency in his own excellence, a proud consciousness of rectitude; possessing extended views cleared from the mists of ignorance, prejudice, and superstition; unfolding the generosity of his nature in the exercise of beneficence, without feeling however any grateful incitement from remembrance of the transcendent generosity of the Son of Man; maintaining, in respect of the events and bustle of the surrounding scene, a dignified indifference, which can let the world go its own way, and can enjoy its tranquillity the while; and living in a cool resignation to fate, without any strong expressions of a specific hope, or even solicitude, with regard to the termination of life and to all futurity. Now whatever degree of resemblance some of these distinctions may bear to the christian theory of happiness,* it is evident that on the whole the two modes are so different that the same man cannot realize them both. The result is obvious; the natural effect of incompetent and fallacious schemes, prepossessing the mind by every grace of genius, will be an aversion to the christian view of happiness, which will appear at the least very strange, and probably very irrational.

It is again a prominent characteristic of this christian Revelation, that, having declared this

* No one can be so absurd as to represent the doctrines which are prevalent in the works of polite literature as *totally*, and at all points, opposite to those of christianity; what I am asserting, is, that in some important points they are substantially and essentially different.

life to be but the introduction to another, it systematically preserves the recollection of this great truth through every representation of every subject; so that the reader is not allowed to contemplate any of the interests of life in a view which detaches them from the grand object and conditions of life itself. An apostle could not address his friends on the most common concerns, for the length of a page, without the final references. He is like a person whose eye, while he is conversing with you about an object, or a succession of objects immediately near, glances with thoughtful consciousness every moment toward some great spectacle appearing on the distant horizon. He seems to talk to his friends in that manner of expression in which you can imagine that Elijah spoke, if he remarked to his companion any circumstance in the journey from Bethel to Jericho, and from Jericho to the Jordan; a manner which needed not to be changed, if he uttered yet a few sentences more after he saw the chariot and horses of fire. The correct consequence of conversing with our Lord and his apostles would be, that the thought of immortality should become as habitually present and familiarized to the mind as the countenance of a domestic friend; that it should be the grand test of the value of all pursuits, friendships, and speculations; and that it should mingle a certain nobleness with every thing which it permitted to occupy our time. Now how far will the discipline of modern polite literature coincide?

I should be pleased to hear a student of that

literature seriously profess that he is often and impressively reminded of futurity; and to have it shewn that ideas relating to this great subject are presented in sufficient number, and in a proper manner, to produce an effect which should form a respectable proportion of the *whole* effect produced by these authors on susceptible minds. But I cannot hope to receive this satisfaction. It is true that the idea of immortality is so exceedingly grand, that many writers of genius who have felt but little genuine interest in religion, have been led by their perception of what is sublime to introduce a thought which is one of the most powerful means of elevating the imagination. And the energy of their language has been worthy of the subject. In these instances, however, it is not always found that the idea is presented exactly in that light which both shews its individual grandeur, and indicates the extent of its necessary connexion with other ideas: it appears somewhat like a majestic tower, which a traveller in some countries may find standing in a solitary scene, no longer surrounded by that great assemblage of buildings, that ample city, of which it was raised to be the centre, the strength, and the ornament. Immortality has been had recourse to in one page of an ingenious work as a single topic of sublimity, in the same manner as a stupendous natural phenomenon, or a brilliant achievement, has been described in another. The author's object might rather seem to have been to supply an occasional gratification to taste, than to reduce the mind and all its feelings under the perpetual dominion of a grand practical principle.

It is true also that a graver class of fine writers, who have expressed considerable respect for religion and for christianity, and who, though not writing systematically on morals, have inculcated high moral principles, have made references to a future state as the hope and sanction of virtue. But these references are made less frequently than the connexion between our present conduct and a future life would seem to claim. And the manner in which they are made sometimes indicates either a deficiency of interest in the great subject, or a pusillanimous anxiety not to offend those readers who would think it too directly religious. It is sometimes adverted to as if rather from a conviction, that if there is a future state, moral speculation must be defective, even to a degree of absurdity, without some allusions to it, than from feeling a profound delight in the contemplation of it. When the idea of another life is introduced to aggravate the force of moral principles and the authority of conscience, it is done at times in a manner which appears like a somewhat *reluctant* acknowledgment of the deficiency of all inferior sanctions. The consideration is suggested in a short and transient form, after the writer has eloquently expatiated on every circumstance by which the present life can supply motives to goodness. In some instances, a watchful reader will also perceive what appears too much like care to divest the idea, when it *must* be introduced, of all direct references to that sacred Person who first completely opened the prospect of immortality, or to some of those other doctrines which he taught in immediate connexion with

this great truth. There is a degree of temptation to suspect the writer of having been pleased that, though the gospel indeed has alone given the assurance of immortality, yet it was a subject of so much conjecture and speculation among the heathen sages, that he may mention it without seeming to refer so directly to the gospel as if he introduced some truth of which not only the evidence, but even the first conception, was communicated by that dispensation.

Taking this defective kind of acknowledgment of a future state together with that entire oblivion of the subject which prevails through an ample portion of elegant literature, I think there is no hazard in saying, that a reader who is satisfied without any other instructions, will learn almost every lesson sooner than the necessity of habitually living for eternity. Many of these writers seem to take as much care to guard against the inroad of ideas from this solemn quarter, as the inhabitants of Holland do against the irruption of the sea; and their writings do really form a kind of moral dyke against the invasion from the other world. They do not instruct a man to act, to enjoy, and to suffer, as a being that may by to morrow have finally abandoned this orb: every thing is done to beguile the feeling of his being a "stranger and a pilgrim on the earth." The relation which our nature bears to the circumstances of the present state, and which individuals bear to one another, is mainly the ground on which their considerations of duty proceed and conclude. And their schemes of happiness, though formed for beings at once immortal and departing, include little expressly

belonging to that world to which they are removing, nor reach beyond the period at which they will properly but begin to live. They endeavour to raise the groves of an earthly paradise, to shade from sight that vista which opens to the distance of eternity.

Another article in which the anti-christian tendency of a great part of our productions of taste and genius is apparent, is, the kind of consolation administered to distress, old age, and death.—Things of a mournful kind form so large a portion of the lot of humanity, that it is impossible for writers who take human life and feelings for their subject, to avoid (nor indeed have they endeavoured to avoid) contemplating man in those conditions in which he needs every kindly support to save him from despair. And here, if any where, we may justly require an absolute coincidence of all moral instructions with the religion of Christ: since consolation is eminently its distinction and its design; since a being in distress seems to acquire the strongest claims to be treated right; and since insufficient consolations are but to mock it, and deceptive ones are to betray. It should then be clearly ascertained by the moralist, and never forgotten, what are the consolations provided by this religion, and under what condition they are offered.

Christianity offers even to the irreligious, who relent amidst their sufferings, the alleviation springing from inestimable promises made to penitence: any other system, which should attempt to console them, simply as suffering, and without any reference to the moral and religious

state of their minds, would be mischievous, if it were not inefficacious. What are the principal sources of consolation, to the pious, is immediately obvious. The victim of sorrow is assured that God exercises his paternal wisdom and kindness in afflicting his children; that this necessary discipline is to refine and exalt them by making them "partakers of his holiness;" that he mercifully regards their weakness and pains, and will not let them suffer beyond what they shall be able to bear; that their great Leader has suffered for them more than they can suffer, and kindly sympathizes still; that this short life was not meant so much to give them joy, as to prepare them for it; and that patient constancy shall receive a resplendent crown.—An aged christian is soothed by the assurance that his Almighty Friend will not despise the enfeebled exertions, nor desert the oppressed and fainting weakness, of the last stage of his servant's life. When advancing into the shade of death itself, he is animated by the faith that the great sacrifice has taken the malignity of death away; and that the divine presence will attend the dark steps of this last and lonely enterprise, and shew the dying traveller and hero that even this melancholy gloom is the very confine of paradise, the immediate access to the region of eternal life.

Now, in the greater number of the works to which I am referring, what are the forms of consolation which sensibility, reason, and eloquence, have most generally exerted themselves to apply to the mournful circumstances of life, and to its close? You will readily recollect such as these: a man is suffering—well, it is the common desti-

ny, every one suffers sometimes, and some much more than he; it is well it is no worse. If he is unhappy now, he *has* been happy, and he could not expect to be happy always. It were ridiculous to complain that his nature was constituted capable of suffering, or placed in a world where it is exposed to the causes of it. If it were not capable of pain, it would not be of pleasure. Would he be willing to lose his being, to escape these ills? Or would he consent, if such a thing were possible, to be any one else?—The sympathy of each kind relative and friend will not be wanting. His condition may probably change for the better; there is hope in every situation; and meanwhile, it is an opportunity for displaying manly fortitude. A strong mind can proudly triumph over the oppression of pain, the vexations of disappointment, and the tyranny of fortune. If the cause of distress is some irreparable deprivation, it will be softened by the lenient hand of time.*

The lingering months of an aged man are soothed almost into cheerfulness by the respectful attention of his neighbours; by the worldly prosperity and dutiful regard of the family that he has brought up; by the innocent gaiety and amusing frolics of their children; and by the consideration of his fair character in society. If he is a man of thought, he has the advantage of some philosophical considerations; the cares

* Can it be necessary to notice here again, that every system of moral sentiments must inevitably contain some principles which the gospel does not disapprove? Various particulars in this assemblage of consolations are compatible, in a subordinate place, with the dictates of christianity. But the enumeration altogether, and exclusively of the grand christian principles, forms a scheme of consolation quite different from that of the religion of Christ.

and passions of his former life are calmed into a wise tranquillity; he thinks he has had a competent share of life; it is as proper and necessary for mankind to have their "exits," as their "entrances;" and his business will now be to make a "well-graced" retreat from the stage, like a man that has properly acted his part, and may retire with applause.

As to the consolations in death, the general voice of these authors asserts the grand and only all-sufficient one to be the recollection of a well-spent life. To this chief source of consolation you will find various additional suggestions; as for instance, that death is in fact a far less tremendous thing than that dire form of it by which imagination and superstition are haunted; that the sufferings of death are less than men often endure in the course of life; that it is only like one of those transformations with which the world of nature abounds; and that it is easy to conceive, and reasonable to expect, a more commodious vehicle and habitation. It would seem almost unavoidable to glance a momentary thought toward what revelation has told us of "the house not made with hands," of the "better country, that is, the heavenly." But yet the greater number of the writers of taste advert to the subject with apparent reluctance, except it can be done, on the one hand, in the manner of pure philosophical conjecture, or on the other, under the form of images bearing some analogy to the visions of classical poetry.* The arguments for resig-

* I am infinitely far from disliking philosophical speculation, or even daring flights of fancy, on this grand subject. On the contrary, it appears to me strange that any one should solemnly en-

nation to death are not so much drawn from future scenes, as from a consideration of the evils of the present life, the necessity of submitting to a general and irreversible law, the dignity of submitting with that calmness which conscious virtue is entitled to feel, and the improbability (as these writers sometimes intimate) that any very formidable evils are to be apprehended after death, except by a few of the very worst of the human race. Those arguments in general are rather aimed to quiet fear, than to animate hope. The writers in question seem more concerned to convey the dying man in peace and silence out of the world, than to conduct him to the celestial felicity. Let us but see him embarked on his unknown voyage in fair weather, and we are not accountable for what he may meet, or where he may be carried, when he is gone out of sight. They seldom present a lively view of the distant happiness, especially in any of those peculiar forms in which the christian revelation has intimated its nature. In which of these books, and by which of the real or fictitious characters whose last hours and thoughts they sometimes display, will you find the apostolic sentiments adopted, "To depart and be with Christ is far better," "Willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord?" The very existence of that sacred testimony which has given the only genuine consolations in death,

tertain the belief of a life to come, without its exciting both the intellectual faculty and the imagination to their highest exercise. What I mean to censure in the mode of referring to another life, is, the care to avoid any direct resemblance or recognition of the ideas which the new testament has given to guide, in some small, very small degree, our conjectures.

and the only just conceptions of the realities beyond it, seems to be scarcely recollected; while the ingenious moralists are searching the exhausted common-places of the stoic philosophy, or citing the dubious maxims of a religion moulded according to the corrupt wishes of mankind, or even recollecting the lively sayings of the few whose wit has expired only in the same moment with life, to fortify the pensive spirit for its last removal. "Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye have sent to inquire of Baalzebub the God of Ekron?"

Another order of sentiments concerning death, of a character too bold to be called consolations, has been represented as animating one class of human beings. In remarking on Lucan, I noticed that desire of death which has appeared in the expressions of great minds, sometimes while merely indulging solemn reflections when no danger or calamity immediately threatened, but often in the conscious approach towards a fatal catastrophe. Many writers of later times have exerted their whole strength, and have even excelled themselves, in representing the high sentiments in which this desire has displayed itself; genius has found its very gold mine in this field. If the affecting grandeur had awakened piety while it exalts the passions, some of the poets would have ranked among our greatest benefactors. Powerful genius, aiding to inspire a christian triumph in the prospect of death, might be revered as a prophet, might be almost loved as a benignant angel. No man's emotions perhaps have approached nearer to enthusiasm than mine, in reading the thoughts which are made to be ex-

pressed by sages and reflective heroes in this prospect. I have always felt these passages as the last and mightiest of the enchantments of poetry, capable of inspiring for a little while a contempt of all ordinary interests, of the world which we inhabit and of life itself. While the emotion has continued, nothing has appeared so desirable as some noble occasion of dying; such an occasion as that supplied by the legal injustice which awarded the hemlock to Socrates, or by the destiny which at Philippi involved Brutus in the ruin of a great design for the liberty of the world*. Poetry has delighted to display personages of this high order, in the same fatal predicament; and the situation of such men has appeared inexpressibly enviable, by means of those sublime sentiments by which they illuminated the gloom of death. The reader has loved to surround himself in imagination with that gloom, for the sake of irradiating it with that sublimity. All other greatness has been for a while eclipsed by the greatness of thought displayed by these contemplative and magnanimous spirits, though untaught by religion, when advancing to meet their fate. But the christian faith recalls the mind from this enchantment to recollect that the christian mode of dying can be the only right and noble mode, and to consider whether these ex-

* Poetry will not easily exceed many of the expressions which mere history has recorded. I should little admire the capability of feeling, or greatly admire the christian temper, of the man who could without emotion read, for instance, the short observations of Brutus to his friend, (in contemplation even of a *self-inflicted* death,) on the eve of the battle which extinguished all hope of freedom; "We shall either be victorious, or remove beyond the power of those that are so. We shall deliver our country by battle, or ourselves by death."

amples be not exceedingly different. Have not the most enlightened and devout christians, whether they have languished in their chambers, or passed through the fire of martyrdom, disclosed their elevation of mind in another strain of eloquence? The examples of greatness in death, which poetry has exhibited, generally want all those sentiments respecting the pardon of sin, and a Mediator through whom it is obtained, and often the explicit idea of meeting the Judge, with which a christian contemplates his approaching end. Their expressions of intrepidity and exultation have no analogy with the language of an incomparable saint and hero, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." The kind of self-authorized confidence of taking possession of some other state of being, as monarchs would talk of a distant part of their empire which they were going to enter; the proud apostrophes to the immortals, to prepare for the great and rival spirit that is coming; their manner of consigning to its fate a good but falling cause, which will sink when they are gone; their welcoming death as a kind of glad revenge against a hated world and a despicable race, are not the humility nor the benevolence with which a christian dies. If a christian will partly unite with these high spirits in being weary of a world of dust and trifles, in despising the pains of death, in panting for an unbounded liberty, it will be at the same time with a most solemn commitment of himself to the divine mercy, which *they* forget, or were never instruct-

ed, to implore. And as to the vision of the other world, you will observe a great difference between the language of sublime poetry and that of revelation, in respect to the nature of the sentiments and triumphs of that world, and still more perhaps in respect to the associates with whom the departing spirit expects soon to mingle. The hero of poetry is going to hold high converse with the souls of warriors, and patriots, and perhaps philosophers; a christian feels himself going (I may accommodate the passage) to "an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant."

In defence of those who have thus rendered death attractive by other means than the evangelical views, it may be said, that many of the personages whom their scenes exhibit in the contemplation of death, or in the approach to it, were necessarily, from the age or country in which they lived or are feigned to have lived, unacquainted with christianity, and that therefore it would have been absurd to represent them as animated by christian sentiments. Certainly. But then I ask, on what principle men of genius will justify themselves for *choosing*, with a view to the instruction of the heart, as they profess, examples, of which they cannot preserve the consistency, without making them pernicious? Where is the conscience of that man, who is most anxious that every sentiment expressed by the historical or fictitious personage, in the fatal sea-

son, should be harmonious with every principle of the character, but feels not the smallest concern about the consistency of selecting or creating the character itself, with his conviction of the absolute authority of the religion of Christ? In glancing forward, he knows that his favorite is to die, and that he cannot die as a christian; yet he is to die with the greatest moral magnificence. Would it not therefore be a dictate of conscience to warn his readers, that he hopes to display the exit with a commanding sublimity of which the natural effect will be, to make them no more wish to die as christians? But how would he feel while seriously writing such a warning? Might it not be said to him, "And are *you* then willing to die otherwise than as a christian? If you are, why do you not declare that christianity is a fable? If you are not, how can you endeavour to seduce your readers into an enthusiastic admiration of such a kind of death as you wish that you may not die? How can you endeavour to inspire those sentiments which would excite your apprehension and compassion for the state of your reader's mind, if you heard him utter them in his last hours? Is it *necessary* to the pathos and sublimity of poetry, to introduce characters which cannot be justly represented without falsifying our view of the most serious of all moral subjects? If this be necessary, it were better that poetry with all its charms should perish, than that the revelation of God should not attain its end, and fix its own ideas of death, clearly and alone, in the minds of beings whose manner of preparing for it is of infinite consequence. But this is far from being the dilemma,

since innumerable examples could be found, or rationally imagined, of christian greatness in death. Is not then this preference of examples inimical to christianity, and is not the sympathetic animation which so easily expresses their appropriate feelings, and informs them with their utmost energy, a baser kind of infidelity, as it is far more mischievous, than that of the cold dealer in cavils and quibbles against the gospel? What is the christian belief of that poet worth, who would not on reflection abhor himself for the affecting scene, which has for a while made each of his readers rather wish to die with Socrates, with Antoninus, or even perhaps with Julian, than with St. John? What would have been thought of the pupil of an apostle, who, after hearing his master describe the spirit of a christian's departure from the world, in language which he believed to be of conclusive authority, and which asserted or clearly implied that this alone was greatness in death, should have taken the first occasion to expatiate with enthusiasm on the closing scene of a philosopher, or on the exit of a stern hero, that, acknowledging in the invisible world no object for either confidence or fear, departed with the aspect of a being who was going to summon his gods to judgment for the misfortunes of his life? And how will these careless men of genius give their account to him who will judge the world, for having virtually taught many aspiring minds that, notwithstanding his first coming was to conquer for man the king of terrors, there needs no recollection of him, in order to look toward death with noble defiance or sublime desire?

Some of their dying personages are so consciously uninformed of the realities of the invisible state, that the majestic sentiments which they disclose on the verge of life, can only throw a slight glimmering on unfathomable darkness; but some anticipate the other world, as I have already observed, in very defined images. I recollect one of them, after some just reflections on the vanity and wretchedness of life, thus expressing his complacency in view of the great deliverer:

"Death joins us to the great majority;
'Tis to be born to Platos and to Cæsars;
'Tis to be great for ever.
'Tis pleasure, 'tis ambition then, to die."

Another, an illustrious female, in a tragedy which I lately read, welcomes death with the following sentiments:

—"Oh 'tis wondrous well!
Ye gods of death that rule the Stygian gloom!
Ye who have greatly died, I come! I come!
The hand of Rome can never touch me more;
Hail! perfect freedom, hail!"

"My free spirit should ere now have join'd
That great assembly, those devoted shades,
Who scorn'd to live till liberty was lost;
But, ere their country fell, abhor'd the light."

"Shift not thy colour at the sound of death;
It is to me perfection, glory, triumph.
Nay, fondly would I choose it, though persuaded
It were a long dark night without a morning;
To bondage far prefer it, since it is
Deliverance from a world where Romans rule."

—"Then let us spread
A bold exalted wing, and the last voice we hear,
Be that of wonder and applause."

"And is the sacred moment then so near?
The moment when yon sun, those heavens, this earth,
Hateful to me, polluted by the Romans,
And all the busy slavish race of men,

Shall sink at once, and strait another state
Rise on a sudden round ?
Oh to be there*!"

You will recollect to have read many that are equally improper to engage a christian's full sympathy, and therefore improper for a poet, admitting christianity, to have written, in order to engage that sympathy. It is a pernicious circumstance in passages like these, that some of the general sentiments of anticipation and high emotion which might be expressed by a dying christian, are combined so intimately with other ideas and a whole state of feeling contradictory to christianity, as to tempt the mind by the approbation of the one into a tolerance of the other.

Sometimes even very bad men are made to display such dignity in death, as at once to excite a sympathy with their false sentiments, and to lessen the horror of their crimes. I recollect the interest with which I read, many years since, in Dr. Young's Busiris, the proud magnanimous speech at the end of which the tyrant dies ; particularly the lines,

" I thank these wounds, these raging pains, which promise
An interview with equals soon elsewhere.
Great Jove, I come !"

Even the detestable Zanga, though conscious that " to receive him hell blows all her fires," appears (if I recollect right) with great elevation in the prospect of death, by means, partly indeed of the sentiments of returning justice, but chiefly

* This is not perhaps one of the best specimens ; it is the last that has come under my notice. I am certain of having read many, but have not just now the means of finding them again.

of heroic courage. To create an occasion of thus compelling us to do homage to the dying magnanimity of wicked men, is an insult to the religion which condemns such magnanimity as madness. It is no justification to say, that such instances have been known, and therefore such representations but imitate reality; for if the laws of criticism do not require in works of genius a careful, an anxious adaptation of all examples and sentiments to the purest moral purpose, as a far higher duty than the study of resemblance to the actual world, the laws of piety most certainly do. Let the men who have so much literary conscience about this verisimilitude, content themselves with the office of mere historians, and then they may relate, perhaps without guilt, if the relation is absolutely simple, all the facts and speeches of depraved greatness within the memory of the world. But when they choose the higher office of inventing and combining, they are accountable for all the consequences. They create a new person, and in sending him into society they can choose whether his example shall tend to improve or to pervert the minds that will be compelled to admire him. If they deliberately choose the latter, the guilt of *creating* is, with respect to the *influence*, the same as the writer would have incurred by practically *being* such an example.

It is an immense transition from such instances as those which I have been remarking upon, to Rousseau's celebrated description of the death of his Eloisa, which would have been much more properly noticed in an earlier page. It is long since I read that scene, one of the most striking

specimens unquestionably of original conception and interesting sentiment that ever appeared; but though the representation is so extended as to include every thing which the author thought needful to make it perfect, there is no explicit reference to the peculiarly evangelical causes of complacency in death. Yet the representation is so admirable, that the serious reader is tempted to suspect even his own mind of fanaticism, while he is expressing to his friends the wish that they, and that himself, may be animated, in the last days of life, by a class of ideas which this eloquent writer would have been ashamed to introduce.

LETTER IX.

DOES it not appear to you, my dear friend, that an approving reader of the generality of our ingenious authors will entertain an opinion of the moral condition of our species very different from the divine declarations? The Governor of all intelligent creatures has spoken of this nation or family of them as exceedingly remote from conformity to that standard of perfection which alone can ever be his rule of judgment. And this is pronounced not only of vicious individuals, who are readily given up to condemnation by those who form the most partial or the proudest estimate of human nature, but of the constitutional quality of that nature itself. The moral part of the constitution of man is represented as placing him immensely below that rank

dignity and happiness to which, by his intellectual powers and his privilege of being immortal, he would otherwise have seemed adapted to belong. The descriptions of the human condition are such as if the nature had, by a dreadful convulsion, been separated off at each side from a pure and happy system of the creation, and had fallen down an immeasurable depth into depravation and misery. In this state man is represented as loving, and therefore practically choosing, those evils which incur the condemnation of God; and it is affirmed that no expedient but that very extraordinary one which christianity has revealed, can change this condition, and avert this condemnation with its formidable consequences.

Every attempt to explain the wisdom and the precise ultimate object of the Supreme Being in constituting a nature subject in so great a degree to moral evil, will fail. But even if a new revelation were given to turn this dark inquiry into noon-day, it would make no difference in the actual state of things. An extension of knowledge could not reverse the fact that the human nature has displayed through every age the most aggravated proofs of being in a deplorable and hateful condition, whatever were the reasons for giving a moral agent a constitution which it was foreseen would soon be found in this condition. Perhaps if a human mind were expanded to a comprehension beyond all other created intelligences, if it could see at once the whole order of the universe, and look into distant ages, it might understand in what manner the melancholy fact could operate to the perfection of the vast system, and according to what principles, and in

reference to what ends, all that has taken place within the empire of the Eternal Monarch is right. But in this contemplation of the whole, it would also take account of the separate condition of each part; it would perceive that this human world, whatever are its relations to the universe, has its own distinct economy of interests, and stands in its own relation and accountableness to the righteous Governor; and that, regarded in this exclusive view, it is an awful spectacle. Now, to this exclusive sphere of our own condition and interests revelation confines our attention, and pours contempt, though not more than experience pours, on all attempts to reason on those grand unknown principles according to which the Almighty disposes the universe; all our estimates therefore of the state and relations of man must take the subject on this insulated ground. Considering man in this view, the sacred oracles have represented him as a more melancholy object than Nineveh or Babylon in ruins; and an infinite aggregate of obvious facts confirms the doctrine. This doctrine then is absolute authority in our speculations on human nature; but to this authority the writers in question seem to pay, and to teach their readers to pay, but little respect. And unless those readers are pre-occupied by the grave convictions of religious truth, rendered still more grave by painful reflection on themselves, and by observation on mankind; or unless they are capable of enjoying a malicious or misanthropic pleasure, like Mandeville and Swift, in detecting and exposing the degradation of our nature, it is not wonderful that they should be prompt to

entertain the sentiments which insinuate a much more flattering estimate. Our elegant and amusing moralists no doubt copiously describe and censure the follies and vices of mankind; but many of these, they maintain, are accidental to the human character, rather than a disclosure of its intrinsic qualities. Others do indeed spring from within, but they are only the wild weeds of a virtuous soil. Man is still a very dignified and noble being, with strong dispositions to all excellence, holding a proud eminence in the ranks of existence, and (if such a Being is adverted to) high in the favour of his Creator. The measure of virtue in the world vastly exceeds that of depravity; we should not indulge a fanatical rigour in our judgments of mankind; nor accustom ourselves to contemplate the Almighty always in the dark majesty of justice. None of their speculations seem to acknowledge the gloomy fact which the new testament so often asserts or implies, that all men are "by nature children of wrath."

It is quite of course that among sentiments of this order, the idea of the redemption by Jesus Christ (if any allusion to it should occur) can appear with but an equivocal meaning, and with none of that transcendent importance with which his own revelation has displayed it. While man is not considered as lost, the mind cannot do justice to the expedient, or to "the only name under heaven," by which he can be redeemed. Accordingly the gift of Jesus Christ does not appear to be habitually recollected as the most illustrious instance of the beneficence of God that has ever come to human knowledge, and as the sin-

gle fact which, more than all facts together, has relieved the awfulness of the mystery in which our world is enveloped. No thankful joy seems to beam forth at the thought of so mighty an interposition, and of him who was the agent of it. When it is difficult to avoid making some allusion to him, he is acknowledged rather in any of his subordinate characters, than as absolutely a Redeemer; or if the term Redeemer, or, our Saviour, is introduced, it is with an awkward formality which betrays that its meaning is but little relished or but little understood. Jesus Christ is regarded rather as having added to our moral advantages, than as having conferred that without which all the rest were in vain; rather as having made the passage to a happy futurity somewhat more commodious, than as having formed the passage itself over what was else an impassable gulf. Thus that comprehensive sum of blessings, called in the new testament Salvation, or Redemption, is shrunk into a comparatively inconsiderable favour, which a less glorious messenger might have brought, which a less magnificent language than that dictated by inspiration might have described, and which a less costly sacrifice might have secured.

It is consistent with this delusive idea of human nature, and these faint impressions of the gospel, that these writers commonly represent eternal felicity as the pure reward of merit. I believe you will find this, as far as any allusions are made to the subject, the prevailing opinion through the school of polite literature. You will perceive it to be the real opinion of many writers who do sometimes advert, in some phrase em-

ployed by way of respectful ceremony to our *national religion*, to the work or sacrifice of Christ.

I might remark on the antichristian motives to action which are more than tolerated among these authors: I will only notice one, the love of glory; that is, the desire of being distinguished, admired, and praised.

No one will deny that to wish for the favourable opinion of the human beings around us, is to a certain extent, and under certain conditions, consistent with the christian laws. In the first place, a material portion of human happiness depends on the attachment of relatives and friends, and it is right for a man to wish for the happiness resulting from such attachment. But the degree in which he will obtain this attachment, will depend very much on the higher or the lower estimate which these persons entertain of his qualities and abilities. In order therefore to attain a great degree of their affection, it is right for him to wish, while he endeavours to deserve, that their estimate might be high.

In the next place, it is almost too plain to need an observation, that if it were possible for a man to desire the respect and admiration of mankind *purely* as a mean of giving greater efficacy to his efforts for their welfare, and for the promotion of the cause of heaven, while he would be equally gratified that any other man in whose hands this mean would have exactly the same effect, should obtain the admiration instead of himself, this would be someting more than innocent; it would indicate a most noble state of mind. But where is the example?

In the third place, as the Creator has fixed this

desire in the essential constitution of our nature, he intended its gratification, in some restricted degree, to be a direct and immediate cause of pleasure. The good opinion of mankind, expressed in praise, pleases us by the same necessary and inexplicable laws according to which mutual affection pleases us, or according to which we are gratified by music, or the beauties and gales of spring. To a certain extent therefore it is innocent to admit the gratification of this desire, simply for the sake of this pleasure.

But to what extent? It is very apparent that this desire has, if I may so express it, an immense voracity. It has within itself no natural principle of limitation, since it is incapable of being gratified to satiety. The applause of a continent has not satisfied some men, nor would that of the whole globe. To what extent, I repeat, may the desire be indulged? Evidently not beyond that point where it begins to introduce its accessories, disdainful comparison, or envy, or competition, or ungenerous wishes. But I appeal to each man who has deeply reflected on himself, or observed those around him, whether this desire under even a considerably limited degree of indulgence does not introduce these accessories, and whether, in order to exclude them from his own mind, he has not often felt it necessary to adopt a severity of restriction approaching near an endeavour to suppress the very desire itself. In wishing to prohibit an *excess* of its indulgence, he has perceived that even a very small degree has amounted, or most powerfully tended, to that excess—with the exception perhaps of

that modification of the desire which has had reference to engaging the affection of relations or a few friends. The measure therefore of this desire which may be permitted consistently with perfect innocence will be found to be most exceedingly small.

Again, the desire cannot be cherished without becoming a motive of action exactly in the degree in which it is cherished. Now if the supreme, though not only motive of action in a pious mind, must be the wish to please God, it is evident that the passion which supplies another motive, ought not to be allowed in a degree that will empower this motive involved in it to contest in the mind the supremacy of the pious motive. But here I again appeal to the reflective man of conscience, whether he has not felt that a very small degree of indulgence of the desire of human applause is enough, not only to render the motive involved in it strong enough to maintain a rivalry with what should be the supreme motive, but absolutely to prevail over it. In each pursuit or performance in which he has excelled, or endeavoured to excel, has he not felt with grief and indignation that his thoughts much more promptly turned to the consideration of human praise than of divine approbation? And when he has been able in some measure to repress this passion, has he not found that a very slight stimulus was competent to restore its impious ascendency?—Now what is the inference from these observations? What can it be but absolutely this, that though the desire of human applause is in some certain small degree innocent, yet that since it so mightily tends to an excess destructive of the

very essence of piety, it ought (excepting in the cases where human estimation is sought purely as a mean toward some valuable end) to be opposed and repressed in a manner NOT MUCH LESS general and unconditional than if it were purely evil; and that all those things and books which tend on the contrary to animate it with new force, are most pernicious? And such an inference is concordant with the spirit of the new testament, which, though not requiring the absolute extinction of the desire of human applause, yet alludes to most of its operations with censure, exhibits probably, no approved instance of its indulgence, and abounds with the most emphatically cogent representations, both of its pernicious influence when it predominates in the mind, and of its powerful tendency to acquire this predominance. Insomuch that a serious reader of this book feels that the degree to which the most indulgent christian casuistry can tolerate this desire, is a degree which it will be certain to reach and to exceed in his mind, in spite of the most systematical opposition. He will perceive that the question is not so much how far he may encourage it, as by what means he may repress it; and that in the effort to repress it, there is no possibility of going to an excess. The most resolute and persevering exertion will still leave so much of this passion as christianity will pronounce a fault or a vice. He will be anxious to assemble, in aid of the discipline by which he endeavours to repress the feeling, all the arguments of reason, all striking examples, and all the solemn representations of the bible.

Now I think I cannot be mistaken in asserting

that much the greater number of our fine writers have done the directly *contrary* of what I have thus represented a devout reader of the new testament as feeling necessary to be done. Which of their advocates will venture to deny that they really have encouraged the love of applause, of fame, of glory, or whatever else it may be called, in a degree which, if the preceding argument is just, places them in the most pointed hostility with the christian religion?—Their good sense has indeed often, without adverting to the religious considerations, admitted the conviction, and compelled the acknowledgment, of the inanity of this glory. Almost all our ingenious writers have occasionally expressed a contempt of the "fool to fame." They perceived the truth, but, as it did not set them free, they were willing after all to dignify a passion to which they felt themselves irretrievable slaves. And they have laboured to do it by celebrating with every splendid epithet the men who were impelled by this passion through the career in which they were the idols of mankind and their own; by describing glory as the best incentive to noble actions, and their worthiest reward; by placing the temple of Virtue (proud station of the goddess) in the situation of being a mere introduction to that of Fame; by lamenting that so few, and their unfortunate selves not of the number, can "climb the steep where that proud temple shines afar;" and by intimating a charge of meanness of spirit against those who have no generous ardour to distinguish themselves from the croud by deeds calculated and designed to command admiration. If sometimes the ungra-

cious recollection strikes them, and seems likely to strike their readers, that this admiration is infinitely capricious and perverse, since men have gained it without claims, and lost it without demerit, and since all kinds of fools have offered the incense to all kinds of villains, they escape from the disgust and from the benefit of this recollection by saying, that it is *honourable* fame that noble spirits seek; for they despise the ignorant multitude, and seek applause by none but worthy actions, and from none but worthy judges. Almost every one of these writers sometimes mentions the approbation of the Supreme Being, as that to which wise and good men will beyond all things aspire; but such an occasional acknowledgment feebly counteracts the effect of many glowing sentiments and descriptions of a contrary tendency. I must read once more, and with a habit of mind adapted to receive impressions in a very different manner, the assemblage of our elegant classics, before I can be convinced that the above representation is unjust; and if it is correct, there can be no question whether they have instructed their readers to tolerate, and even to cherish, antichristian motives of action.

I will only remark on one particular more, namely, that the lighter order of these writers, and some even of the graver, have increased the unacceptableness of christian doctrines to minds of taste, by their manner of ridiculing the cant and extravagance by which hypocrisy, enthusiasm, or the peculiarities of a sect or a period, may have disgraced them. Sometimes indeed they have selected phrases for the purpose which were *not* cant, and which ignorance and impiety

alone would have dared to ridicule. And often in exposing to contempt the follies of language or manners by which a christian of good taste deplores that the profession of the gospel should ever have been marked, they take not the smallest care to preserve a clear separation between what taste and sense have a right to explode, and what piety commands to reverence. By this criminal carelessness (unless indeed it were *design*) they have fixed disagreeable and irreverent associations on the evangelical truth itself, for which many persons, afterwards become more seriously convinced of that truth, have had cause to wish those pages or volumes had gone into the fire, instead of coming into their hands. Many others, who have not become thus seriously convinced, retain the impression and cherish the repulsion. Gay writers ought to know that this is dangerous ground.

I am sorry that this extended censure on works of genius and taste could not be conducted in a less general style, and with more discriminative references than the continual repetition of the expressions, "elegant literature" and, "these writers." It might be a service of some value to the evangelical cause, if a work were written containing a clear and serious estimate, individually, of the most popular writers of the last century and a half, in respect to the important article on which I have been remarking; with formal citations from some of their works, and a candid statement of the general tendency of others. In an essay like this it is impossible to make an enumeration of names, or pass a judgment, except in a very slight occasional manner,

on any particular author. Even the several *classes* of authors, which I mentioned some time back, as coming under the accusation, shall detain you but a moment.

The Moral Philosophers for the most part seem anxious to avoid every thing that might subject them to the appellation of Christian Divines. They regard their department as a science complete in itself; and they investigate the foundation of morality, define its laws, and affix its sanctions, in a manner generally so distinct from christianity, that the reader would almost conclude that religion to be *another* science complete in itself. An *entire* separation indeed it is hardly possible to preserve; since christianity has decided some moral questions on which reason was dubious or silent; and since that final retribution which the new testament has so luminously foreshewn, is incontrovertibly one of the greatest of sanctions. To make *no* reference, while inculcating moral principles, to a judgment to come, after it has been declared, on what has been confessed to be divine authority, would look like systematic irreligion. But still it is striking to observe how small a portion of the ideas which distinguish the new testament from other books many moral philosophers have thought indispensable to a theory in which they professed to include the entire duty and interests of men. A serious reader is constrained to feel that either there is too much in *that* book, or too little in theirs. He will perceive that in the inspired book the moral principles are intimately interwoven with all those doctrines which could not have been known without that revela-

tion. He will find also, in this superior book, a vast number of ideas avowedly designed to interest the *affections* in favour of all moral principles and virtues. These ideas are taken from a consideration of the divine mercy, the compassion of the Redeemer, and other topics to which moral philosophers have very rarely alluded. And though the same definition would apply to any given virtue as illustrated in the inspired and in the philosophic page, yet the manner in which it bears on the conscience and the heart is very considerably different.—The difference becomes momentous, if it should be found that the sacred authority pronounces the virtues of a good man not to be the cause of his acceptance with God, and that the philosophic moralists disclaim any other. On the whole it will perhaps be concluded that there must be something very defective in that theory of morality which makes so slight an acknowledgment of the religion of Christ, and takes so little of its peculiar character. The philosophers place the religion in the relation of a diminutive satellite to the world of moral and eternal interests; useful as throwing a few rays on that side of it on which the solar light of human wisdom could not directly shine; but that it can impart a vital warmth, or that it claims the ascendant power and honours, some of them seem not to have a suspicion.

Without doubt, innumerable reasonings and conclusions may be advanced on moral subjects which shall be *true* on a foundation of their own, equally in the presence of the evangelical system and in its absence. Without any reference to that system, or if it had never been appointed or

revealed, it had been easy to illustrate the utility of virtue, the elevation which it confers on a rational being, its conformity with the order of the universe, and many other views of the subject. It would also have been easy to pass from virtue in the abstract into an illustration and enforcement of the several distinct virtues as arranged in a practical system. And if it should be asked, Why may not some writers employ their speculations on those parts and views of moral truth which are independent of the gospel, leaving it to other men to christianize the whole by the addition of the evangelical relations, motives and conditions? I readily answer, That this may sometimes very properly be done. An author may render valuable service by explaining for instance the utility of virtue in general, or of any particular virtue, or by a clear illustration of any other circumstance of the moral system. In doing this, he would expressly take a marked ground, and aim at a specific object. He would not let it be imagined for a moment that this particular view of the subject of morals involved all the relations of that subject with the interests of man, and with God. It would be fully understood that a multitude of other considerations were indispensable to a complete moral theory. But the charge against the moral philosophers is meant to be applied to those who have professed to consider morals under a comprehensive view including all the relations in which they are connected with duty and happiness; and who in this comprehensive view seem quite to have forgotten the implication of moral with evangelical truth, since they neither include the evangelical

ideas in their speculations, nor appear conscious of a defect.

When I mention our Historians, it will instantly occur to you, that the very foremost names in this department imply every thing that is deadly to the christian religion itself, as a divine communication, and therefore lie under a condemnation of a different kind. But as to the generality of those who have not been regarded as enemies to the christian cause, have they not forgotten what was due from its friends? The historian intends his work to have the effect of a series of moral estimates of the persons whose actions he records: now, if he believes that a Judge of the world will come at length, and pronounce on the very characters that his work adjudges, it is one of the simplest dictates of good sense, that all the awards of the historian should be most carefully co-incident with the judgments which may be expected from that supreme authority on the last day. Those distinctions of character, which the historian applauds as virtues, or censures as vices, should be exactly the same qualities, which the language already heard from that Judge certifies us that he will applaud or condemn. It is worse than foolish to erect a literary court of morals and human character, of which the maxims, the language, the decisions, and the judges, will be equally the objects of contempt before that sacred Arbiter. - What a wretched abasement will overwhelm on that day some of the pompous historians, who were called by others, and deemed by themselves, the high authoritative censors of an age, and whose verdict was to fix on each name immortal honour

or infamy, if they shall find many of the questions and the decisions of that tribunal proceed on principles which they would have been ashamed to apply, or never took the trouble to understand. How they will be confounded, if some of the men whom they had extolled, are consigned to ignominy, and some that they had despised, are applauded by the voice at which the world will tremble and be silent. But such a sad humiliation will I think be apprehended for many of the historians, by every serious christian reader who shall take the hint on this subject along with him through their works. He will not seldom feel that the writers seem uninformed, while they remark and decide on actions and characters, that a final Law-giver has come from heaven, or that he will come, or on what account he will come, yet once more. Their very diction often abjures the plain christian denominations of good and evil: nor do I need to enumerate the dubious terms which they have employed in their place. How then can a mind which learns to think in *their* manner, learn at the same time to think in *his* from whose opinions it will however be found no light matter to have dissented, when they shall be declared for the last time in this world?

The various interesting sets of short essays, especially the Spectator and Rambler, must have had during a season at least a very considerable influence on the moral taste of the public; and probably they have a considerable influence still. The very ample scope of the Spectator gave a fair opportunity for a serious writer to introduce, excepting science, a little of every subject connected with the condition and happiness of men.

How did it happen that the stupendous circumstance of the redemption by the Messiah, of which the importance is commensurate with the whole interests of man, with the value of his immortal spirit, with the government of his Creator in this world, and with the happiness of eternity, should not have been a few times in the long course of that work very fully and solemnly exhibited? Why should not a few of the most peculiar of the doctrines comprehended in the subject have been clothed with the fascinating elegance of Addison, from whose pen many persons would have received an occasional evangelical lesson with incomparaby more candour than from any professed Divine? A pious and benevolent man, such as the avowed advocate of christianity ought to be, should not have been contented that so many thousands of minds as his writings were adapted to instruct and to charm, should have been left, for any thing that he very explicitly attempted to the contrary in his most popular works, to end a life which he had contributed to refine, acquainted but slightly with the grand security of happiness after death. Or if it was not his duty to introduce in a formal manner any of the most specifically evangelical subjects, it might at least have been expected, that some of the many serious essays contained in the Spectator should have had more of a christian tinge, more references to the sentiments of the gospel, intermingled with the speculations concerning the Deity, and the gravest moral subjects.—There might easily have been more assimilation of what may, as it now stands, be called a *literary* religion, to the spirit of the new testament.

From him also, as a kind of dictator among the majority of the elegant writers of the age, it might have been expected that he would have set himself, with the same decisive and noble indignation which his Cato had shewn against the betrayers of Roman liberty and laws, to denounce that ridicule which has wounded religion by a careless or by a crafty manner of holding up its abuse to scorn: but of this the Spectator itself is not free from examples.

Addison wrote a book expressly in defence of the religion of Christ; but to be the dignified advocates of a cause, and to be its humble disciple, may be very different things. An advocate has a feeling of making himself important, he seems to *confer* something on the cause; but as a disciple, he must feel littleness, humility, and submission. Self-admiration might find much more to gratify it in becoming the *patron* of a beggar, than the *servant* of the greatest potentate. Addison was moreover very unfortunate, for any thing like justice to the gospel, in the class of persons with whom he associated, and whom he was anxious to please. One can imagine with what a perfect storm of ridicule he would have been greeted, on entering one of his celebrated coffee-houses of wits, on the day after he should have published in the Spectator, a paper, for instance, on the necessity of being devoted to the service of Jesus Christ. The friendship of the world ought to be a "pearl of great price," for its cost is very serious.

The majestic mind of Johnson was much more capable of scorning the ridicule, and defying the

opposition, of wits and worldlings. And yet it is too probable that his social life was eminently unfavourable to a deep and simple consideration of christian truth, and the cultivation of christian sentiment; and that the very ascendency by which he intimidated and silenced impiety, contributed to the injury. As far as I remember, he associated with men of whom many were very learned, some were extremely able, but of whom comparatively few made any decided profession of piety, and perhaps a considerable number would in other society have shewn a strong propensity to irreligion. This however seldom dared to discover itself in Johnson's presence; and it is impossible not to revere the strength and noble severity that made it so cautious. But this repression of irreligion had the effect of rendering many men acceptable associates, with whom his judgment, his conscience, and all his moral feelings, would have forbidden much friendly intercourse, if those men had habitually assumed the freedom of fully disclosing themselves. Decorum in respect of religion being preserved, he could take a most lively interest in the company of men who drew forth the utmost force and stores of his mind, in conversations on literature, moral philosophy, and general intelligence, and who could enrich every subject of social argument by their learning, their genius, or their knowledge of mankind. But if there was at the same time a repressed impiety latent in their minds, it was impossible that it should not infuse into the sentiments which they expressed, a certain quality uncongenial with chris-

tianity, though every thing avowedly opposed to it were in his company avoided. Now, through the complacency which he felt in such intellectual intercourse, this quality would in some degree steal into his own ideas and feelings. For it is not in the power of the strongest and most vigilant mind, amidst the animated interchange of eloquence, to avoid some degree of assimilation to even the least approved sentiments of men whose intellectual wealth or energy gives so much pleasure, and commands so much respect. Thus the very predominance by which he could repress the direct irreligion of statesmen, scholars, wits, and accomplished men of the world, might, by retaining him their intimate or frequent associate, subject him to meet the influence of that irreligion acting in a manner too indirect and refined to excite his hostility or even his caution.

But indeed if his caution was excited, there might still be a possibility of self-deception in the case. He would feel it, and justly feel it, so great an achievement to constrain such men as I have described, to adopt, when with him, a high style of moral sentiment, purified from all obvious irreligion, that he might be too much inclined to be satisfied with such an order of sentiments. It would be difficult for him to admit that what was actually a victory over impiety, could be itself less than christianity. He would rather be inclined to consider how far these men were obliged to advance in the gradations of serious thought to join him, than how far he had yet himself to advance to join the apostles. It is hard for a man to suspect himself deficient in that

very thing in which he not only excels other men, but mends them. Nothing can well be more unfortunate, for christian attainments, than to be habitually in society where a man will feel as if he displayed a saintly eminence of character by obtaining a decent silence on subjects, on which it has been the delight of the wisest and most devout men to expatiate.

If there is any truth in the representations which compose so large a part of this essay, Johnson's continual immersion, if I may so express it, in the studies of polite literature, must have subjected him to no small measure of an influence, which it requires a more intimate and habitual familiarity with the christian principles than perhaps we are warranted to believe he maintained, to prevent from being injurious to a man's views and feelings concerning religion.

It must however be admitted that this illustrious author, who, though here mentioned only in the class of essayists, is to be ranked among the greatest of moral philosophers, is less at variance with the principles which appear to be displayed in the new testament, than almost any other distinguished writer of either of these classes. But few of his speculations comparatively tend to beguile the reader and admirer into that spirit which, on turning to the instructions of Jesus Christ and his apostles, would feel estrangement or disgust; and he has more explicit and solemn references to the grand purpose of human life, to a future judgment, and to eternity, than almost any other of our elegant moralists has had the piety or the courage to make. There is so much

that most powerfully coincides and co-operates with christian truth, that the disciple of christianity deeply regrets to meet occasionally a sentiment, respecting perhaps the review of life, the consolations in death, the effect of repentance, or the ground of acceptance with God, which he cannot reconcile with the evangelic theory, nor with those principles of christian faith in which Johnson sometimes avowed his belief. In such a writer he cannot but deem such deviations a momentous fault.

Omission is his other capital fault. Though he did introduce in his serious speculations, as I have observed, more distinct allusions to religious ideas than most other moralists, yet he did not introduce them so often as every serious writer should, especially a writer who frequently carries seriousness to the utmost pitch of solemnity. There scarcely ever was an author in whose works an ample share of explicit christian sentiment was more strictly indispensable than in the moral writings of Johnson. No writer ever more completely exposed and blasted the folly and vanity of the greatest number of human pursuits. The countenance of Medusa could not have darted a more fatal glance against the tribe of gay triflers, the competitors of ambition, the proud possessors of wealth, or the men who consume their life in useless speculations. His severe and just condemnation strikes indeed at almost all classes, and all the most favourite employments, of mankind. But it was so much the more peculiarly his duty to insist, still more fully than he did, on that one model of character,

that one grand employment of life, which is enjoined by heaven, and which will stand the test of the most rigid moral speculation, and of the last judgment. No author has more impressively displayed the misery of human life; he laid himself under so much the stronger obligation to unfold at large the only effectual consolations, the true scheme of felicity as far as it is attainable on earth, and the delightful prospect of that better world which has so often inspired exultation in the most melancholy situations. No writer has better illustrated the rapidity of time, and the shortness of life; he ought so much the more fully to have dwelt on the views of that eternity at which his readers are reminded that they will so quickly arrive. No writer will easily make more poignant reflections on the pains of guilt; was it not most indispensable that he should oftener have directed the mind suffering this deepest distress to that great sacrifice once offered for sin? No writer represents with more accurate and mortifying truth the failure of human resolutions and the feebleness of human efforts in the contest against corrupt inclination, depraved habit, and temptation; why did not this melancholy contemplation and experience prompt a very frequent recollection, and a most emphatical expression of the importance, of that divine assistance, without which the bible has fully warned us that our labours will fail?

In applying the censure to the poets, it is very gratifying to meet with so much to applaud in the greatest of all their tribe. Milton's genius might harmoniously have mingled with the angels that

announced the Messiah to be come, or that on the spot and at the moment of his departure predicted his coming again; might have shamed to silence the muses of paganism, or softened the pains of a christian martyr. Part of the poetical works of Young, those of Cowper, Watts, and a few others, have animated a very great number of minds with sentiments which they did not feel it necessary to repress or extinguish, in order to listen with complacency to the language of Christ and his apostles. But as to the great majority of the poets, it would be most curious to try what kind of religious system, and what view of the economy of man, would be formed by the assemblage of all the sentiments belonging or alluding to the subject throughout their works; if such an experiment were worth the trouble, and there were any person sufficiently in the state of the ingenious Huron to perform it justly. But if it would be exceedingly amusing to observe the process and the fantastic result, it would in the next place be very sad to consider, that these fallacies have been insinuated by the charms of poetry into countless thousands of minds, with a beguilement that has, first, diverted them from a serious attention to the gospel, then formed them to an habitual dislike of it, and finally betrayed some of them to the doom which beyond the grave, awaits the neglect of Jesus Christ.

You have probably seen Pope cited as a christian poet by some pious authors, whose anxiety to impress reluctant genius into an appearance of favouring christianity, has credulously seized on

any occasional verse, which seemed an echo of the sacred doctrines. No reader can admire, more than I, the discriminate thought, the finished execution, and the galaxy of poetical felicities, by which Pope's writings are distinguished. But I cannot refuse to perceive, that almost every allusion in his lighter works to the names, the facts, and the topics, that peculiarly belong to the religion of Christ, is in a style of profane banter; and that, in most of his graver ones, where he meant to be dignified, he took the utmost care to divest his thoughts of all the mean vulgarity of christian associations. "Off, ye profane!" might seem to have been his address to all evangelical ideas, when he began his Essay on Man; and they were obedient, and fled. I do not know in what manner that Essay was attacked by Crousaz, or defended against him; but it appears obviously enough, after detaching the detail and illustrations, so as to lay bare the outline and general principles, that it is an elaborate attempt to redeem the whole theory of the condition and interests of men, both in life and death, from all the explanations imposed on it by an unphilosophical revelation from heaven. And in the happy riddance of this despised though celestial light, it exhibits a sort of moon-light vision, of thin impalpable abstractions, at which a speculatist may gaze, with a dubious wonder whether they are realities or phantoms, but which a practical man will in vain try to seize and turn to account, and which an evangelical man will disdain to accept in substitution for those applicable and affecting forms of truth with which his

religion has made him conversant. But what deference to christianity was to be expected, when such a man as Bolingbroke was the genius whose inspiration was to illuminate, and the demigod* whose approbation was to crown, the labours which were to conjoin these two venerable names according to the wish of the poet, in everlasting fame?

If it be said for some parts of these dim speculations, that though christianity comes forward as the practical dispensation of truth, yet there must be, in remote abstraction behind it, some grand, ultimate, elementary truths, of which this dispensation does not inform us, or which it reduces from their pure recondite into a more palpable and popular form; I answer, And what did the poet, or "the master of the poet and the song," know about these truths, and how did they come by their information?

A serious observer must acknowledge with regret, that such a class of productions as novels, in which folly tries to please in a greater number of shapes than the poet enumerates in the Paradise of Fools, is capable of producing a very considerable effect on the moral taste of the community. A large proportion of them however consist too much of pure folly to have any more specific counteraction to Christian principles than that of mere folly in general; excepting indeed that the most flimsy of them will occasionally contribute their mite of mischief, by alluding to a christian profession in a manner that identifies

* He is so named somewhere in Pope's works.

it with the cant by which hypocrites have aped it, or the extravagance with which fanatics have distorted it. But a great and direct force of counteracting influence proceeds from those which eloquently display characters of eminent vigour and virtue, when that virtue is founded on no basis consolidated by religion, but on a mixture of refined pride with generous feeling, or expressly on those philosophical principles which are too often accompanied, in these works, by an avowed or strongly intimated contempt of every idea of any religion, especially the christian. If the case is mended in those into which an awkward religion has found its way, it is rather because the characters excite, less interest, than because that which they *do* excite, is favourable to religion. No reader will probably be impressed with the dignity of being a christian by seeing, in one of these works, an attempt to combine that character with the fine gentleman by means of a most ludicrous apparatus of amusements and sacraments, churches and theatres, morning-prayers and evening-balls. Nor will it perhaps be of any great service to the christian cause, that some others of them profess to exemplify and defend, against the cavils and scorn of infidels, a religion of which it does not appear that the writers would have discovered the merits, had it not been established by law. One may doubt whether any one will be more than amused by the venerable priest, who is introduced, probably among wicked lords and giddy girls, to maintain the sanctity of terms, and attempt the illustration of doctrines, which

these well-meaning writers do not perceive that the worthy gentleman's college, diocesan, and library, have but very imperfectly enabled him to understand. If the reader even wished to be more than amused, it is easy to imagine how much he would be likely to be instructed and affected by such an illustration or defence of the christian religion, as the writer of a fashionable novel would deem a graceful expedient for filling up his plot.

One cannot close such a review of our fine writers without melancholy reflections. That cause which will raise all its zealous friends to a sublime eminence on the last and most solemn day the world has to behold, and will make them great for ever, presented its claims full in sight of each of these authors in his time. The very lowest of those claims could not be less than a conscientious solicitude to beware of every thing that could in any point injure the sacred cause. This claim has been slighted by so many as have lent attraction to an order of moral sentiments greatly discordant with its principles. And so many are gone into eternity under the charge of having employed their genius, as the magicians their enchantments against Moses, to counteract the Saviour of the world.

Under what restrictions then ought the study of polite literature to be conducted? I cannot but have foreseen that this question must return at the end of these observations; and I can only answer as I have answered before. Polite literature will necessarily continue to be the grand school of intellectual and moral cultivation. The

evils therefore which it may contain, will as certainly affect in some degree the minds of the successive students, as the hurtful influence of the climate, or of the seasons, will affect their bodies. To be thus affected is a part of the destiny under which they are born, in a civilized country. It is indispensable to acquire the advantage; it is inevitable to incur the evil. The means of counteraction will amount, it is to be feared, to no more than palliatives. Nor can these be proposed in any specific method. All that I can do, is, to urge on the reader of taste the very serious duty of continually recalling to his mind, and if he is a parent or preceptor, of cogently representing to his pupils, the real character of the religion of the new testament, and the reasons which command an inviolable adherance to it.

THE END.

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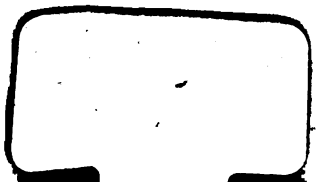
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